The True Grace of God

T. A. Coates

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THE

TRUE GRACE OF GOD.

BY

C. A. Coates

D. Edmond Hiebert
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GRACE FOR THE GUILTY.

BETWEEN the British and Spanish territories at Gibraltar there is a quarter of a mile of land which belongs to neither, and is called "neutral ground." It is to be feared that many people think there is a wide piece of "neutral ground" between those who are saved and those who are lost. They dare not say that they are saved, and they will not admit that they are lost. So the devil—old arch-deceiver that he is—cheats them alike out of the blessings of the believer and the opportunities of the sinner.

With all the earnestness of which I am capable I warn you against this delusion. There is no middle class,

NO NEUTRAL GROUND.

Sovereigns are either good or bad, and souls are either saved or lost.

You may be able to say that you are as good as, or better than, most of your neighbours; and it is perhaps your opinion that if *you* don't get to heaven many others will stand a poor chance. That may be true; but there is an awful possibility that you may find yourself shut out along with them. Suppose that a recruiting sergeant came to your town to enlist soldiers

for the Life Guards. Twenty young men apply to be enlisted, and while they are waiting for the sergeant to bring his measuring standard they begin to measure themselves by one another. One finds he is half an inch taller than another. "I have a better chance than you," he says. He measures himself with another, and finds that he is an inch taller. "Well," says he, "if I don't pass you will stand a poor chance." He goes on until he finds that he is the tallest man in the company. Then the sergeant comes in and sets up his standard, and the tallest man steps briskly up to it. "Pass on," says the sergeant, "you are too little." He was taller than all the others, but he was not up to the standard, and was rejected as a Life Guardsman just as much as the shortest man in the company.

In the third chapter of Romans we read these solemn words, "*there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*"; and in the same chapter "all the world" is pronounced "*guilty before God.*" Whatever you are before men, or in comparison with others, you are

"GUILTY BEFORE GOD."

You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting. You are not up to the standard.

I have spoken to some hundreds of people about salvation, and I never but once met with a man who was bold enough to say that he had never committed any sins. I did not believe him at the time, and I afterwards heard that he had been in prison for attempting to murder his wife. Now, how many sins do you suppose it would take to keep a man out of heaven? How many sins did Adam and Eve commit

before they were driven out of the garden of Eden? Only *one*. IF ONE SIN made them unfit to dwell in the earthly paradise, do you not think that *one sin* would make a man unfit for the heavenly paradise? "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth." (Rev. xxi. 27.) You must be whiter than snow, or never enter there.

I daresay that you do not *feel lost*. You are not conscious of being unusually wicked, and you expect to be all right at the last. Let me remind you that it is with *God* you have to do, and His estimate of you is a true one; for "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." You may deceive others, and what is worse, may deceive yourself, but you cannot deceive God. Hence the

FIRST STEP TO BLESSING

is to learn what you are in God's sight, and to accept His estimate of yourself rather than your own. The first utterance of God in creation was, "Let there be light," and in the new creation of a soul this is the first act of grace. A dirty man *in the dark* may think he is clean; so a sinner whose conscience has not been enlightened may be satisfied with himself. But when God says, "Let there be light," a Job cries out, "*I am vile*"; an Isaiah groans, "*Woe is me*"; Simon the fisherman confesses, "*I am a sinful man, O Lord*"; and one like Saul of Tarsus can only call himself "*chief of sinners.*"

In the opening verses of Romans v. we have a fourfold description of those for whom Christ died—

(1) "When we were yet *without strength.*"

(2) "In due time Christ died for the *ungodly.*" (*v.* 6.)

(3) "While we were yet *sinners*, Christ died for us." (*v.* 8.)

(4) "When we were *enemies*, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son." (*v.* 10.)

How wonderfully do "GRACE AND TRUTH" shine together in this scripture! Here the foul disease and the certain remedy are seen together. Guilt is fully discovered, but it is in the light of grace. Sin appears in connection with love that puts it away. And if our true character is painted in its darkest colours, it is that we may know the riches of the grace that seeks our blessing in spite of it all. Do not then, I beseech you, imitate the Pharisees who "rejected the counsel of God against themselves," and refused to take the guilty sinner's place before Him. For if the light of God's grace does not find you out and expose you in your true character now, depend upon it the light of God's judgment will find you out by-and-bye. Be honest with your own soul and with God, and take home to yourself the solemn truth that you are "without strength," "ungodly," "a sinner," and "an enemy" needing to be reconciled to God.

If you refuse to accept this fourfold description as being true of yourself, you thereby shut yourself out from the saving value of Christ's death. It was for those who could by no means save, or help to save, themselves that Christ died. It was for ungodly sinners, yea, for those who were enemies to God in their mind, that He gave His life; and if you are not such a one you have neither part nor lot in the blessings which flow from His death. A lifeboat is for the drowning, a physician is for the sick, and *a Saviour is for lost sinners.*

Do not make a mistake. You may be decent and moral in your life, fair and upright in your dealings with your fellow-men, a good husband, a dutiful wife, an obedient child, or a faithful servant, and yet be *unsaved*. You may attend church, chapel, or mission-room, with the greatest regularity, and yet be among the many who are on the broad road. You may even be a communicant, a church member, a liberal giver to charitable and religious causes, a Sunday-school teacher, or a preacher, and at the same time be *a lost sinner on the way to death and eternal judgment.*

Blame not that honesty of speech which warns you in plain terms of your danger. It is far better to be disturbed from your carnal security in this world than to be damned in the next. Think of

ETERNITY.

The day speeds on when all that men call great and grand will crumble into dust: "the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein, shall be burned up." (2 Pet. iii. 10). At that day you will either be seated in glory, or suspended in space before the great white throne to be judged according to your works—either *inside* the pearly-gated city whose light is the Lamb, or *outside*, lighted along the dark road to judgment by the crimson torch of a burning world. You must spend eternity either with God and the Lamb and all the shining hosts of the redeemed upon the plains of light, or with the devil and the demons and all the damned in the lake of fire.

And, remember, it will *then* be too late to escape. In hell there will be no Bible to cast its blessed light

upon a pathway of safety; no gospel message will ring through the cheerless vaults; no evangelists will offer pardon; there will be no Christ to save, and no blood to cleanse. Thank God! it is not yet too late, but do not trifle with present grace. You may remember the loss of the vessel called the *Central America*. She was in a bad state, had sprung a leak and was going down, and she therefore hoisted a signal of distress. A ship came close to her, the captain of which asked through the trumpet, "What is amiss?" "We are in bad repair, and are going down: lie by till morning," was the answer. But the captain on board the rescue ship said, "Let me take your passengers on board now." "Lie by till morning," was the message which came back. Once again the captain cried, "You had better let me take your passengers on board now." "Lie by till morning," was the reply which sounded through the trumpet. About an hour and a half after the lights were missing, and though no sound was heard, she and all on board had gone down to the fathomless abyss. Unconverted friend, do not say, "Lie by till morning." Now is the accepted time. To-day you may enter into life; to-morrow the door may be shut.

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

I now address myself to those in whose hearts the above momentous inquiry has arisen. One part of your need, at least, you are already conscious of, viz., *the need of pardon for your sins.* I should be glad to think that some who will read this book are as anxious to have the knowledge of forgiveness as an elderly lady to whom I once put the question, "Are your sins

forgiven?" I shall never forget the wistful look that came into her eyes and the earnest trembling tones of her voice, as she said, "Sir, I would give all that I possess to know that." I found that she had long known her need of pardon, and that she prayed, and read her Bible, and went to church, and was hoping that it might be well at last. She knew not the grace of God, nor the value of the precious blood of His Son. Many are in a similar state, and it is to such I now speak.

Let me assure you, at the outset, that pardon for sins cannot be bought with money, or earned by good works, or won by tears and prayers. If you spent all your life in reading the Bible and in prayers; if you wept out the contrition of your heart in an ocean of penitential tears; yea, if you gave all your goods to the poor, and your body to be burned; none of these things would secure the pardon of your sins. Nay, I will go further, and say that *if you could* by some means acquire to yourself the combined merits of all the saints of God who ever lived on earth, there is not value enough in all their holy living and dying to absolve one of your sins.

God's Word is plain—"*It is the blood* that maketh an atonement for the soul." (Lev. xvii. 11.) There is, there could be, no pardon without atonement, no remission apart from redemption. "Without shedding of blood is NO REMISSION." (Heb. ix. 22.)

Is it not a solemn and humbling fact that though we have almost unlimited power to commit sins, we have no power whatever to atone for them when they are committed? This closes the door against all the pride of man, and shuts us up entirely to God.

God Himself is the source of every blessing for lost man, and *He wants to forgive you.* Listen to some of His words. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, *but that He loved us,* and sent His Son to be *the propitiation for our sins.*" (1 John iv. 10.) The only begotten Son of God came into the world heralded by the announcement, "Thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people *from their sins.*" (Matt. i. 21.) In view of what He was about to accomplish, that blessed Saviour could say, "This is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many *for the remission of sins.*" (Matt. xxiv. 28.) He did actually upon the cross "SUFFER FOR SINS, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter iii. 18); and His resurrection on the morning of the third day put the seal of God's infinite satisfaction upon His great atoning work. Then as the risen Saviour—the Accomplisher of redemption — He appeared to His disciples, "and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and *remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations,* beginning at Jerusalem." (Luke xxiv. 46, 47.)

BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD!

God has provided a Lamb; He has found a Ransom. Full atonement has been made, and in divine righteousness you may be pardoned. God is "just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Rom. iii. 26.) Simple, naked faith in Jesus and His blood will secure you the full and free remission of your sins. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." (1 John i. 7.)

God is now proclaiming the pardon of sins to every creature under heaven, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to Peter—"To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name *whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins.*" (Acts x. 43.) Listen to Paul—"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that *through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:* and by Him all that believe are justified from all things." (Acts xiii. 38, 39.) Listen to John—"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God. . . . I write unto you, little children, because *your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.*" (1 John v. 13; ii. 12.)

Let me beseech you, then, to receive this blood-bought pardon—to believe *now* on the Lord Jesus Christ. May the language of your heart be—

"On the Lamb my soul is resting,
What His love no tongue can say;
All my sins, so great, so many,
In His blood are washed away.

"Sweetest rest and peace have filled me,
Sweeter praise than tongue can tell;
God is satisfied with JESUS,
I am satisfied as well.

"Conscience now no more condemns me;
For His own most precious blood,
Once for all has washed and cleansed me,
Cleansed me in the eyes of God!"

Satan's object is gained if he can induce sinners to *despise Christ* on the one hand, or to *despair of Him* on the other. The first he accomplishes by filling the heart with the world and the things that are in the world, so that the blessed Saviour is unthought of and

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neglected by those for whom He died. The latter he seeks to effect by bringing before us our sins, unworthiness, weakness of faith, inconsistency, and so on.

So long as we were satisfied with the world and its things, and did not think about our souls, or value Christ at all, Satan never suggested any doubts and fears to us. When the strong man armed kept his palace *his goods were in peace.* It was when the Spirit of God touched our hearts and made us feel that we needed a Saviour, and we began to be somewhat drawn to the Lord Jesus, that doubts and fears began to trouble us. When Satan sees that we no longer *despise* Christ, he says, "I will do my best to make you *despair of Him.*"

The Spirit of God makes us think of our sins, our unworthiness, etc., in order to lead us to *despair of self;* and Satan tries to use these same things to make us *despair of Christ.*

When I think of myself, of all that I have done and been, and of what I am, I might well despair if one jot or tittle of my salvation depended on myself; but the precious gospel assures me that Another has undertaken and accomplished the mighty work for me. He loved me, though He knew well that nothing but His own death and the cleansing of His precious blood could make me fit for Himself or for God. Everything in me was so bad and worthless that I deserved to die, and yet His love was so great that He died *for me.*

Doubts and fears arise from the fact of looking to find something in self to build on. Some look within for experiences, some for feelings of joy and peace, and some for faith. This is not looking simply and only TO CHRIST. It is really looking to find some token of

salvation in self, instead of believing God's testimony about His Son, and finding an object of faith, outside self altogether, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

My experiences are often very poor: my feelings are not always what I should like them to be, and my faith is weak enough; but

MY SAVIOUR

is crowned with glory and honour at God's right hand, and He is altogether worthy of my heart's confidence. I cannot trust myself, my feelings, or my faith, but I can trust HIM, and this is the faith that saves. "Whosoever believeth IN HIM *shall receive remission of sins.*" (Acts x. 43.) May God give you to see that in your salvation you must be nothing but a lost sinner, and CHRIST must be everything.

Many a converted man who has joyful seasons in thinking of the love of God and the Person of Jesus, has times of wavering and doubt when he thinks of his sins. When the great white throne rises up before him and he thinks of the day of judgment, there is an inward tremor lest after all it should not go well with him.

Now the full gospel of the Grace of God removes all such fears, whether temporary or chronic, because it shows how all the believer's sins have been put away at the cross after being judged in the Person of Christ, so that every believer stands where judgment can never come. I trust to be able to show you from Scripture that every question of sin and judgment has been settled for the believer by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, and God can never raise those questions again with us who believe on His Son.

You cannot have true

PEACE WITH GOD

or the proper enjoyment of His grace until you see this. There is a most beautiful view of the Bay of Naples from the summit of Vesuvius, but some people who ascend the mountain do not enjoy the view. Why? Because it is a volcano, and there are strange rumbling noises, and quiverings of the earth, and from deep within the mountain's burning breast comes hot sulphurous smoke, and people doubt their safety. They are too much occupied with thoughts of their own danger to enjoy the beautiful scenery; and I am sure you cannot enjoy the magnificent panorama of divine grace and glory which is spread out in the Word of God until you know that you are in a place of perfect and everlasting security yourself.

I remember reading a book in which the authoress described a terrific thunderstorm that she witnessed among the Alps. She said it was one of the most beautiful sights she had ever seen. But it was her position that enabled her to enjoy it. She was far up on a lofty mountain peak in the calm, still air of a summer's evening, with a cloudless sky over her head, and the storm was in the valley beneath her. The lightning seemed to be writing strange characters of fire on a background of jet, and the thunder rolled in majestic melody amongst the great mountains in their white robes of perpetual snow. She was above the storm. Perhaps the poor people in the valley were trembling for their lives and the safety of their homes. She was above the storm in perfect peace.

Now let me ask, Are *you* above the storm or under it?—the storm-cloud of God's judgment charged with

eternal thunders? Are you in your sins, an unbeliever in Christ? Then you are under the storm, for we read, "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God *abideth on Him*." (John iii. 36.) Are you a believer in Christ? Have you received Him by believing on His name? Then I want to take you *by faith* up to the sunny heights of resurrection glory, where your Saviour is seated, and let you look down to the cross to see there, far beneath you,

THE STORM

that bowed His blessed head when He took your place under judgment and in death. He was under the storm. He has endured its full violence, and He has come victoriously out of it, and has put you and me above it, where no thunderbolt can ever reach us.

The Lord Jesus Christ has borne and put away our sins. "Christ died for our sins." (1 Cor. xv. 3.) "He gave Himself for our sins." (Gal. i. 4.) "His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree." (1 Peter ii. 24.) "He was once offered to bear the sins of many." (Heb. ix. 28.) The many are all those who believe on His name. Not everybody's sins. Scripture never says that. There are scriptures which say that He died for all, and that He gave Himself a ransom for all, and that He is the propitiation for the whole world; and these scriptures show that Christ is available for the whole race of sinners. God says, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (Rev. xxii. 17.) All are invited: none excluded. But Scripture is careful to teach that it is the believer's sins which Christ bore and suffered for on the cross.

The Lord Jesus was there in that darkness which no

human eye could penetrate, drinking the cup of judgment which our sins had filled. He passed through three terrible hours of soul-suffering which can never be fathomed, and then cried,

"IT IS FINISHED."

The bitter cup was drained to its very dregs. The last burning drop was exhausted. The work was done. *Done* for your salvation; *done* as God required it to be done; and *done* as Christ alone could do it.

Now, let me assure you that if the gospel contained no more than the fact that Christ has died it would fail to give us perfect peace. An element of uncertainty would still remain, and our assurance would not be without a cloud. I believe the great reason why so many converted persons have not peace with God is because *in their faith they have not got beyond the cross.* They have never seen by faith

A RISEN SAVIOUR.

Yet *the resurrection* of Jesus was the prominent theme of apostolic testimony. If we read that "Jesus our Lord was delivered for our offences," it is added, "*and was raised again* for our justification." (Rom. iv. 25.) The Holy Ghost says, "Christ that died, *yea rather, that is risen again.*" (Rom. viii. 34.) And Paul's summary of the gospel in 1 Corinthians xv. 3, 4 is "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and *that He rose again the third day* according to the Scriptures."

The resurrection of Jesus proves that the sins which He bore on the cross are all put away, that the power of death is broken, that the devil is vanquished, and, in short, everything that was against us before God

has been completely removed; for God has raised the One who has done it all in glory and power from the dead, and He is the living and glorious Witness to the value and completeness of His own finished work.

Behold Him as He comes into the midst of His disciples. (John xx. 19.) He comes, the mighty risen Saviour, from the stupendous battlefield of Calvary, with the scars of His great conflict fresh upon Him, having put away His people's sins, having defeated all their foes, having silenced every accusing voice, and He says—

"PEACE BE UNTO YOU."

His own living presence in resurrection dissolved every doubt, banished every fear, assured every heart, and filled every conscience with divine peace. Dear anxious soul, take these two precious words—one from the lips of a dying, and the other from those of a risen Saviour—"IT IS FINISHED," and "PEACE BE UNTO YOU," and bind them round your heart. May they be the assurance and the stay of your soul for ever!

Then there is another part of your need which is plainly pointed out by the following incident. A man deeply exercised about his soul was conversing with a friend on the subject, when the friend said, "Come at once to Jesus, for He will take away all your sins from your back." "Yes, I am aware of that," says the other; "but what about my back? I find I have not only sins to take away, but there is myself; what is to be done with that?"

I feel sure that many who will read these lines have discovered, through grace, not only that they have committed sins, but that they have an evil nature. You have found out to your sorrow that "when you

would do good, evil was present with you." (Rom. vii. 21.) Distinct from the sins you may have been guilty of, your nature is evil. It is important to observe the distinction between SIN and SINS. In Scripture the principle of evil in man is called SIN, and the evil actions which he does are called SINS. One is the tree and the other the fruit. *Sin* is man's natural state. You had not to commit some crime or do some wicked action to become a sinner. Every child of Adam's race is born in sin (Psalm li. 5), and as such is a child of wrath. (Eph. ii. 3.) "The wages of SIN is death." (Rom. vi. 23.) Altogether apart from any question as to the number or the magnitude of your actual transgressions, death is your portion as one descended from Adam.

The flesh—the carnal nature which we possess as children of Adam—has no good thing in it. From centre to circumference it is wholly and hopelessly bad—so bad that God does not attempt to mend it. The work of grace in souls begins with *the new birth.* By a divine operation of the Holy Ghost in connection with the Word of God the subject of grace is "born again." God, so to speak, rejects the old material altogether, and begins entirely anew. The very fact that a man must be born again proves that as in the flesh he is utterly unfit for God.

It is an immense step in our progress towards deliverance when we identify ourselves with that which has been wrought in us by God. This point is reached in Romans vii. 15-17—"Now then it is no more I that do it, but *sin* that dwelleth in me." The exercised one identifies himself with that which is of God, and judges everything of a contrary nature

to be *sin.* He takes sides with God, and passes judgment upon himself as in the flesh—"I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing." (*v.* 18.) The necessity for the new birth proclaimed this on God's part, and the one born again is made to realize it experimentally.

The one who has reached this point knows the need for deliverance. *Sin* dwells in him: he judges that in him, that is, in his flesh, dwells no good thing; evil is present with him; and though after the inward man (with whom he now identifies himself) he delights in the law of God, he finds himself in helpless captivity to the law of sin which is in his members. He can only cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" He wants to be freed from all that he is linked with as a child of Adam. Thank God! through Jesus Christ our Lord such a deliverance is possible, and the believer may enjoy it.

The seventh chapter of Romans gives us an outline of the experience of one born anew who is finding out under law the terrible consequences of being linked with Adam. The eighth chapter is the unfolding of Christian liberty, enjoyed by one who knows what it is to be "in Christ Jesus," and who has been made free from "the law of sin and death" by "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." It is not my intention to enter into the large and blessed subject of deliverance, which is a subject in advance of my present theme, but to point out that in the death of Christ the *root* has been dealt with as well as the *fruit.* "Our old man has been crucified with Him." It is of immense importance for every Christian to know that

"our old man" has been fully judged and ended before God. *Not changed or forgiven, but utterly condemned in the death of Christ.* "God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, *condemned sin in the flesh.*" (Rom. viii. 3.) Where sin brought us, love brought Christ—even to death; and His death is the end *before God* of all that we were as children of Adam—men in the flesh.

Then, on the other hand, we learn that "the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." We have life in One who is risen from the dead. We did belong to the race of which Adam was head; but the death of Christ is, in God's reckoning, the termination of our history in that character. We now belong to a race, the Head of which is Christ risen. We have been transferred by divine grace from Adam to Christ.

Oh, believer, let these marvellous truths enter the depths of thy soul! Why, if Christ bore my sins; if the judgment which those sins deserved fell upon Him; if I, as a child of Adam and a man in the flesh, died with Christ; there never can by any possibility be any judgment for me.* Everything about me that should be judged—my sins and the evil nature that committed them—has been judged, once for all, at the cross. Christ went down under divine judgment

* "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ"; but this, for the believer, is for *manifestation* and to receive *reward*, not for *condemnation*. Everything in our history will come out there; but this will enhance the sense of the value of Christ's work in our hearts. As McCheyne sung—

> "Then, Lord, shall I fully know—
> Not till then—*how much I owe.*"

The following scriptures prove that there will be *no condemnation* for the believer: John iii. 18, 24; Romans viii. 1, 33, 34; 1 John iv. 17.

and into death, was buried, and has come up again in resurrection; and just as the children of Israel saw the Egyptians all dead on the shore of the Red Sea, I can see at the cross

A PERFECT CLEARANCE

before God of everything that could bring judgment upon me.

Christ has risen in triumph from the grave. He is for ever beyond death and judgment, and He is the life of every believer. By faith we see that blessed One raised, ascended, glory-crowned, and seated on the very throne which He has vindicated with His blood; and while we gaze on Him with wondering and adoring eyes, the Holy Ghost speaks to our souls, saying, "*As He is, so are we in this world.*" (1 John iv. 17.) Not only has Christ taken our place in death and judgment, but we have Him as our life, and His place of acceptance and favour before God is ours. We are "accepted in the Beloved." (Eph. i. 6.)

"Once we stood in condemnation,
  Waiting thus the sinner's doom;
Christ in death has wrought salvation,
  God has raised Him from the tomb.
Now we see in Christ's acceptance
  But the measure of our own;
Him who lay beneath our sentence,
  Seated high upon the throne."

"PEACE WITH GOD."

BELIEVERS on the Lord Jesus Christ may be divided into three classes. An old lady in Yorkshire told me she had had doubts and fears ever since her conversion, which had taken place sixty years before. She was truly converted, and looking only to Jesus and His blood for salvation, but she had no assurance. She represents one class. If some of the plain and blessed statements of the Word of God had been brought before her at the time of her conversion, she might have escaped much of the trying experience of those sixty years. Instead of being directed to the Word of God as the ground of assurance, she had been told to examine herself for evidences of grace, and to measure her acceptance with God by her experience and the state of her feelings. This kept her in a sad perplexity of unrest and self-occupation through all those long years.

Then there are thousands who have listened to a clearer gospel than the old lady had been privileged to hear, and they have had many precious and assuring texts of Scripture brought before them, upon which their faith has laid hold. John iii. 16, John v. 24, Romans x. 9, 1 Timothy i. 15, and many other texts, have been used thus to give assurance to souls. Nor will the Word of God fail those who thus rest upon it

and make it the stay of their souls. But *assurance* is not quite the same thing as *peace*. To be safe in the lifeboat and to know it is one thing, to be landed on the shore is another. *Peace* is known when one is beyond the reach of the storm. Many have assurance of eternal security who do not know what it is to have "peace with God." These are in class number two.

The third class is the one to which I trust every reader of this book may belong. It is composed of those who, being justified by faith, have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also they have access by faith into the favour of God wherein they stand. (Romans v. 1, 2.)

There are four things which hinder souls from having *Peace*:—

1. Sins.
2. The judgment of God.
3. Their own weakness and inconsistency.
4. The fear of death.

I will use four Old Testament pictures to show how every question in connection with these four things has been met and settled for the believer.

1. SINS.

"And when he hath made an end of reconciling the holy place, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat: and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into

the wilderness: and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited [margin, 'a land of separation']: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness." (Leviticus xvi. 20–22.) Many believers in Jesus do not know that their sins are put away. I had trusted the Saviour some little time before I knew that my sins were put away. I believed that God had forgiven them, and that He would not charge me with them, and that it was for Christ's sake He had done it. But it was a great joy to me when I saw that they were *gone*—actually carried out of God's sight, and removed from before Him by being borne by Jesus. The scapegoat carried the iniquities, transgressions, and sins of the children of Israel into "a land of separation." Christ once in the end of the world hath appeared "to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many." (Hebrews ix. 26–28.) We can never know what it cost that blessed Saviour to "bear our sins in His own body on the tree." No one could explain the meaning of those simple words, "the sacrifice of Himself." If we think of His Godhead glory and of all His perfection in manhood, we may learn something of the greatness of redemption when we see that it could only be accomplished by "the sacrifice of Himself"—by the absolute surrender of His holy and blessed Person to bear all that was due to us on account of our sins.

"Our sins, our guilt, in love divine,
Confessed and borne by Thee;
The gall, the curse, the wrath were Thine,
To set Thy ransomed free."

In that dark hour of untold sorrow in which He had to cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" He removed our sins into a "land of separation," from which they can never return. Blessed be His name for this stupendous work of divine love.

"This Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool. For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." (Hebrews x. 12–14.) Here the perfection of the Saviour's work shines forth in a glorious way. He has so removed our sins that there is nothing to hinder Him from sitting on the right hand of God. The One who took our sins upon Him is at the right hand of God. Then where are our sins? GONE. ETERNALLY GONE BY HIS ONE SACRIFICE.

The throne of God has no charge against the believer in Jesus. When Christ took His seat at the right hand of God, it was as the One who had glorified God completely about our sins. Hence there is not a cloud above. You may say, "But I have many clouds." That is because you are so low down. Get a little higher up. There are no clouds at the right hand of God, and your Saviour is there. In God's account there is not a spot left on one of His children. The nearer the believer comes to God, the more plainly does he see how completely he is cleared by the work of Christ. "By one offering He hath *perfected for ever* them that are sanctified." We are before God in the uninterrupted and eternal efficacy of that "*one offering.*" Nothing can be added to it

or taken from it. It is a perfect offering, and by it we are "perfected for ever." That is, sins can never be put to our account any more; we are in the efficacy and value of a sacrifice which has removed them all. If we were not "perfected for ever" by the offering of Christ, one of two things must happen. We should either be lost, or Christ would have to suffer again to put away the sins which were not taken into account at Calvary. Thank God! the two things are equally impossible. The "one offering" has *settled* the question of our sins, and by it we are "perfected for ever."

This is applied to our consciences by the blessed testimony of the Holy Ghost. "Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that He had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; *and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.*" (Hebrews x. 15–17.) The efficacy of the sacrifice is made known to us by this divine testimony. The believer needs no priestly absolution; he has greater witness than that of men.

But some anxious soul will say, "Ah! that is just what I want. If I had the witness of the Spirit I should be happy and at rest; but, alas! I have not that witness." My friend, you are looking in the wrong place for the Spirit's witness. You must not look within. The witness of the Spirit is not an inward feeling or consciousness of pardon; it is a witness recorded in the imperishable words of Holy Scripture. The witness of the Spirit is not a vague uncertainty of inward consciousness; it is *a written*

testimony that lies plain and clear on the pages of the Word of God. What is the witness? It is this: "*Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.*" Every believer is entitled to know that the question of his sins is divinely and eternally settled. This is one great element of PEACE.

2. THE JUDGMENT OF GOD.

The true condition of the world is plainly declared in Romans iii. 19, when it is said "that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become subject to the judgment of God." (Margin.) There is no exception to this solemn and sweeping statement. "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John iii. 36.) Certainly there can be no peace in such a position as this. The judgment of God must be removed before *Peace* can be known. While the world was yet in its youth God gave an awful testimony to the fact that it was subject to His judgment, and He also furnished a type of that which alone can give shelter and peace. I refer to the flood.

"And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an ark of gopher wood . . and, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die." (Genesis vi. 13, 14, 17.) It is very evident that when the flood came the whole world was under the judgment of God. All flesh was hidden either beneath the waters or in the ark. Wherever a

bit of flesh was visible judgment came upon it. The end of all flesh came before God.

The ark was a figure of the death of Christ, and just as it furnished *the only shelter* then, so now it is only under cover of the death of Christ that any can escape the judgment of God. This is a very solemn thing to admit, but every baptized person has professedly recognized it. Baptism is the outward profession of it, though none but converted persons —true believers—are really under the shelter of Christ's death. We have bowed to the solemn truth that we were under the judgment of God, and we have gladly availed ourselves of the death of Christ for shelter from that judgment. Now I want to call your attention to the testimony of Peace, as we get it here in figure.

"And he stayed yet other seven days; and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; and the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf pluckt off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth." (Genesis viii. 10, 11.) Here we have a striking type of the testimony of the Holy Ghost. The dove brought a testimony that *one bit was clear of the judgment*—there was one spot from which the judgment had passed—and this was the message of peace to those in the ark. To-day the Holy Ghost brings the testimony that *One Person* is beyond the judgment. He who was "a green olive tree in the house of God" has emerged from death and judgment in perennial resurrection beauty. He was under it for us, but He has come out of it in resurrection power.

If you want to see the dove with the olive leaf in

her mouth, read the Acts of the Apostles. See how the Holy Ghost bears witness to a risen Christ. "Whom God hath raised up" (ii. 24); "This Jesus hath God raised up" (ii. 32); "Whom God hath raised from the dead" (iii. 15); "Whom God raised from the dead" (iv. 10); "Him God raised up the third day" (x. 40); "But God raised Him from the dead" (xiii. 30); etc. etc. Over and over again this blessed fact is presented, that Jesus is clear of the judgment He was once under.

Faith is the window of the soul—the only avenue by which divine light can come to us—and it is by the window of faith that the Spirit's testimony to a risen Saviour reaches our souls. And what is the gain of it? Why, we learn that He who was "delivered for our offences" has been "raised again for our justification." (Romans iv. 25.) In God's sight and reckoning we are as clear of all the judgment as He is. He has been under it; the waves and billows have gone over Him; He has passed through death's dark raging flood; but He is beyond it for ever now, and this "for our justification." In God's reckoning we are as clear of it all as He is.

Have you received the blessed testimony of the Holy Ghost to a risen Saviour, and to the precious fact that *your* standing with God is identical with *His?* If we believe on Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, we can say, "Therefore being justified by faith, *we have peace with God* through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans v. 1.)

Then, further, we read, "And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on

the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in His heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake." (Genesis viii. 20, 21.) Those who had been in the ark came upon new ground with God, and stood before Him in the savour of the burnt offering. There are many who have the ark without the altar. They know what it is to be under *shelter* of Christ's death, but they have not by faith taken their place in the *sweet savour* of that precious death. Christ has gone to God in all the sweet savour of His death, and has entered into God's unclouded favour with a divine title to bring us there. He is entitled to introduce every believer to the favour of God. "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace [favour] wherein we stand." (Romans v. 2.) Have you stepped into this place of divine favour? Have you "by faith" appropriated your place in that circle of light? Every believer is entitled to stand there, as clear of all the judgment as Christ is, and in the favour of God.

There is one thing more in connection with the flood to which I should like to call your attention. "And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set My bow in the cloud." (Genesis ix. 12, 13.) The bow spanning the heavens in prismatic beauty was the divine attestation of God's covenant promise that the flood should never return. It is a figure of Christ in glory. A GLORIFIED SAVIOUR is the ever-blessed declaration that it is a divine impossibility for judgment to reach the believer. The perfection of divine love is known thus. "Herein is love with us

made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as He is so are we in this world." (1 John iv. 17.) When we see that God has set us before Him according to the state and acceptance of Christ risen and glorified, His perfect love casts all fear out of our hearts. We are above the clouds, and beyond the reach of the storm, in divine Peace.

3. OUR OWN WEAKNESS AND INCONSISTENCY.

Many are hindered from having peace by the consciousness of their own weakness and imperfection. They feel they are not what they ought to be. Their efforts to be holy, and to live like Christians, have resulted in so much failure that they are oftentimes sadly perplexed and cast down. Satan does not fail to take advantage of this, and to raise all kinds of questions in the soul, so that the exercise and soul-trouble experienced at this stage are often greater than at the first conviction of sin. We see a type of this in Exodus xiv.

PEACE was an impossibility for the children of Israel so long as they were within reach of Pharaoh's power. When he appeared in pursuit of them they were "sore afraid." They were utterly unable to face him. Has not my reader felt something of this? You have struggled against doubts, and done your best to present a bold face to the foe, and yet been inwardly conscious that you were in a helpless and defenceless condition. It is when this point is reached that the soul is prepared to learn the greatness of "the salvation of the Lord." The outstretched rod of Moses divided the sea, and opened a way of escape for the despairing people. This is a figure of the

death of Christ as that which has opened up a way for us into a position where it is impossible for the enemy to assail us. *Death*—which was the greatest terror to us naturally—is now our way of escape. The Lord Jesus has been into it for us, and has thus divested it of all its terrors. There is "dry ground" on which faith can travel through death into the standing of a risen Saviour. To use the figure, we walk through the death of Christ; that is, we apprehend by faith the death of Christ as that which entitles us in heart and conscience to leave behind, as to our place and standing with God, all that we are as children of Adam, and to take a new place with God in the standing of Christ risen. This is the place which divine grace gives to every believer.

If I am viewed as a child of Adam, I am a hopeless and helpless wreck. But Christ has died and been raised again, that by His death I might be cleared before God of all that attached to me as a child of Adam. He has been "raised again for our justification." Have you walked by faith through the death of Christ on to that new ground before God, where you stand in the absolute clearance and divine favour in which your risen Saviour is found—in the presence of God? Can the enemy find any imperfection there? Can he find a flaw in our justification? It is impossible. And thus, as to his power over our consciences, he is completely destroyed. The doubts, the self-inspections, the alternating hopes and fears, the harassing questionings and misgivings then give place to cloudless PEACE. No hostile power can ever gain a footing on that shore of resurrection; no

accusing voice can ever be heard there; the enemy can never invade that land of PEACE. "The Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever"; "Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore"; "they sank into the bottom as a stone"; "they sank as lead in the mighty waters." No language could be plainer or more emphatic. I admit it is the language of a type. If you want it in New Testament words it is here: "We believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans iv. 24, 25; v. 1.)

4. THE FEAR OF DEATH.

Death is a terrible thing to a creature who has capacity to estimate its tremendous import and moral significance without any power to meet it. The utter confusion and dismay, which the fear of death produces in a sensitive conscience, is well illustrated by the fear which fell upon the army of Israel when challenged by Goliath. (1 Sam. xvii.) I suppose every man in Israel felt that to encounter Goliath must result in certain defeat. We are made to feel that we cannot face death, or meet him who has its power.

But David came upon the scene, and the giant fell. Christ has met all the power of death; He has met all that is so terrible to our impotence, and has triumphed over it all. With holy joy we see Him return victorious from the valley of conflict, and we sing of His triumph. There are no reserves to reckon with. The whole array of death's terrors—the whole

mighty force of him who has the power of death—was brought against Christ, and has been annihilated for all who believe. David has slain his ten thousands. The bow of the mighty is broken; the weapons of war have perished; and PEACE is the happy and eternal portion of the believer.

But one must be in the realm of faith to know the victory of Christ. There is no evidence in the sphere of sight that death is a conquered foe, or that Satan's power is annulled. It is in *the region of faith* that a risen Saviour is known in the greatness of His victory. May God introduce the reader of this book to that blessed region, that in the peace of Christ's victory he may be able to sing, "He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation."

THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT.

IT is of deep importance that we should be impressed with the fact that the gift of the Spirit is a great reality. There are many precious doctrines in the Scriptures, and amongst them are the truths connected with the presence here of the Spirit of God during the absence of Christ. But the gift of the Spirit is a reality—an actual fact; that is, each one in this company either has or has not received the Holy Ghost. I believe it would please Satan well for us to regard the gift of the Spirit merely as one of the doctrines of Christianity, and as one item in an orthodox creed. Be assured of this, that when believers settle down and drift along in a sleepy and dormant profession, without exercise, and making no spiritual progress, they have lost all sense of the reality of the gift of the Spirit. If the hearts of God's children were awakened to consider this great and blessed reality, I feel sure that exercise would be produced which would be fruitful in spiritual blessing and growth.

I should like to say a few words, in the first place, about

THE RECEPTION OF THE SPIRIT.

Paul asks the Galatian believers an important question when he says, "This only would I learn of you,

Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Gal. iii. 2.) It is evident from the whole context that the apostle is pressing upon them the impossibility of getting any blessing from God on the ground of "the works of the law"; it must all come in the same way as they had got the Spirit, and that was "by the hearing of faith." God had wrought in their souls a sense of need, and when Paul preached the gospel to them there was, on their part, the "hearing of faith," and in connection therewith they received the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Then it becomes necessary to ask, What did Paul preach to them? in other words, What is the Gospel? It must be a wonderful message which secures such a gift to those who listen to it with "the hearing of faith." To answer these questions fully it would be needful to go through much of the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, but for my present purpose it will suffice to say that three things, at any rate, were distinctly prominent in the preaching of the apostles:—

1. An accomplished redemption.
2. A risen Saviour.
3. The assurance of forgiveness and justification through faith in the risen and glorified Saviour.

See Acts ii. 23–39; iii. 15–19; x. 39–44; xiii. 26–41; Rom. iv. 22–v. 1; 1 Cor. xv. 1–4; etc. etc.

1. The Messiah had come into the world and had been rejected, but at the very moment when His rejection was consummated redemption was accomplished. Man's wickedness and the working out of God's blessed will met at the cross. The fierce cry, "Away with Him! Crucify Him!" showed that man

did not want God, but that wondrous redemption work is the eternal witness that God wants man.

2. The Accomplisher of redemption has been raised from the dead. The One who suffered for sins, who went under the judgment of God as made sin, who entered into and tasted death—and all this for the glory of God—has been raised in triumph and glory and set at God's right hand. Who can question the supreme satisfaction of God in the Man Christ Jesus, seeing He has raised Him from the dead and given Him glory?

3. Now the testimony of God is that "through His Name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive the remission of sins." (Acts x. 43.) The proclamation of grace runs thus: "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." (Acts xiii. 38.) There was evidently the "hearing of faith" on the part of those to whom Peter preached in the house of Cornelius, when they thus heard "the word of truth," the gospel of their salvation; and, having believed, they were sealed with the Holy Spirit. (Eph. i. 13.) We receive the Spirit on the ground that redemption is accomplished, that Christ is raised and glorified, and that we believe the gospel which gives us unwavering assurance of forgiveness and justification through and by the risen Saviour.

So that the question for those who do not know whether they have received the Spirit or not is, "What have you received by the hearing of faith?" If you know, on the authority of the Word of God,

that your sins are forgiven, and that you are justified from all things, there is no scriptural reason for doubting that you have got the Spirit. If you do not know that your sins are forgiven, and that God will not impute sin to you, you have not yet believed "the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." It is not the *doubter* or the *hoper*, but the BELIEVER who receives the gift of the Spirit.

As this is a matter of great importance I will read a few verses from the Epistle to the Romans in connection with it, where we shall also see the first effect of the Spirit indwelling the believer. "For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. . . . And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his (Abraham's) sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God . . . the

love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." (Rom. iv. 3–8, 22–v. 2, 5.)

Here we see that God in wondrous grace imputes righteousness, without works, to the believer, and this on the ground of redemption. There has been One found to bear our sins and their judgment, so that God can righteously set us in His presence without a spot and hold us to be clear of every charge. Jesus our Lord has been "raised again for our justification." This is a marvellous truth, if you consider what infinite satisfaction God has in that risen One. Every believer would rejoice to own that Christ risen is the complete and worthy Object of God's satisfaction and favour. But God has set Him there with a view to have us in the same standing and acceptance. When God raised Him He was thinking of us—"for our justification." God has set Himself free by the work of the cross to have us before Him in the standing and favour of Christ risen. If you take that in, your heart will be assured of the love of God. It is a glorious moment for us when we learn that nothing less will satisfy the heart of God than that we should have the place of Christ risen, and that to secure it Christ died for us when sinners and ungodly, and in this way God commends His LOVE to us. It is a wonderful moment, because it is the moment when our hearts first get a true sense of *the love of God*. This is the first wave of the Spirit's power in our souls—the first effect of His indwelling; He sheds the love of God abroad in our hearts. This I take to be

THE JOY OF SALVATION,

and the Spirit given is the divine spring of it. Instead

of doubts, fears, and misgivings, which naturally arise in the heart when there is a sense of unworthiness and failure, we have the blessed assurance that in God's reckoning we are in the standing and favour of Jesus our Lord. And we know the love of God as the source of all our blessing; the Holy Ghost sheds it abroad in our hearts. How could a human heart know divine love? It would be impossible if God had not given us His Spirit. Think of the greatness of it. Don't get into the way of repeating such scriptures as if they were commonplace matters. To have the love of God shed abroad in the heart is an overpowering joy—it is superlative blessing—it is rapture no tongue can tell.

And this leads me to call your attention to God's object in giving us the Spirit. Why has God conferred this marvellous Gift upon us? We could not possibly suppose that God would give His Spirit as a mere deposit that should make no change in our thoughts or in our moral constitution. You could not conceive that one might receive the Spirit without an immense change—a total revolution—being effected in the whole course of his thoughts and affections. *God's object in giving us the Spirit is to bring us into harmony with His own thoughts and affections.* The Spirit is given to us that we might be on the line and in the current of divine thoughts and affections—that we might be "*in the Spirit.*" I trust I may be enabled to bring before you what is involved in this.

It is very evident that the Holy Ghost was not given until the Lord Jesus had died and taken His place, as risen and glorified, at the right hand of God. (John vii. 39; Acts ii. 33.) That is, so long as man

in the flesh was before God, whether without law or under law, there was no gift of the Spirit. God's thoughts and affections could find no answer or object in a sinful and ruined race. After the fall there was nothing in Adam or his children in which God could find satisfaction. Two great facts are made clear in the Old Testament. First, that when man is left to himself he has no *desire* to do God's will. This comes out very plainly before the flood, and in the heathen world. Second, that when called by grace to have to do with God he has no *power* to carry out the will of God. This comes out in the history of the children of Israel, to whom the law was given when they were professedly anxious to do God's will.

What has thus been manifested on a large scale in the history of the world has also been proved in our individual experience In our unconverted days we cared nothing about God's will; we did not recognize in any way that God had a claim upon us. Then when we were awakened and converted, and began to know something of God and to desire to do His will, it was the greatest distress possible to find that we had *no power* to do it. Every fresh ray of light, and every deepened desire to live to God, only caused us greater unhappiness by deepening our consciousness of failure. So long as you are on this line the more light you get, and the more earnest you are in your desires, the more unhappy you will be. In fact, the end of it will be that you will be brought down in your soul's experience to *death*. "The commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death." "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of this body of death?" (Rom. vii. 10, 24.)

When we are brought down to this we are prepared to understand the meaning of, and the deep necessity for, *the death of Christ.* God does not set the law before us, or One who has kept it for us; He sets before us

A CRUCIFIED ONE.

(Gal. iii. 1.) One who has been made under the law, not to be an Example for us in that position, but to redeem us from it altogether. (Gal. iv. 4, 5.) One who has been lifted up on the cross to end in death the man who had neither the desire nor the power to carry out God's will, so that we might be set free from the law, and have Him, risen and glorified, as the controlling object of our hearts. We are thus brought on to a new line altogether. We see the end of "our old man" at the cross. We have found out that we are helpless and worthless, and we are glad to see that the death of Christ is the end of our history as in the flesh.

It is on the ground that sin in the flesh has been *condemned* in the death of Christ (Rom. viii. 3) that the Spirit is given to us. God cannot recognize the flesh at all; He has utterly condemned it in the death of Christ; hence, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in us, we are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit. (Rom. viii. 9.) The fact that the Spirit of God dwells in us is the proof that in God's thoughts we are on a new line and in a new state altogether, and He dwells in us for the purpose of bringing us in our souls consciously on to that new line.

But Satan will do all that he can to thwart the purposes of God, and to hinder us from getting the good of the gift of the Spirit. How successfully he can work we may learn from the history of the

churches in Galatia. The apostle had to ask them, "Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (Gal. iii. 3.) Under the influence of Judaising teachers they were turning back to works of law: observing days, months, times, and years; they were being constrained to be circumcised, and in many ways were being entangled again with the yoke of bondage. And no doubt they persuaded themselves that in this way they would become more holy, and better pleasing to God.

But all this was a terrible triumph of the enemy, who had succeeded thereby in diverting the saints altogether from the line and current of the Spirit. They were occupying themselves with the cultivation of holy and religious *flesh*. One difference between Romans and Galatians is that in Romans we have the flesh, if I may so say, in its crude state, but in Galatians it is flesh with a religious polish on it, and this is more dangerous, because more deceptive, than the other. But when the flesh sets up to be good and holy it is always a hypocrite. There is always a want of uprightness in connection with religious flesh. Peter and the other Jews refrained from eating with the Gentiles after that "certain came from James," because they wanted to keep up their religious reputation with their Jewish brethren. (Gal. ii.) They "dissembled," and even Barnabas was "carried away with their dissimulation." Very often believers will do things in secret that they would not do in the company of their brethren. It is a sad thing to make yourself better before men than you are before God.

Paul, on the other hand, was on the line of the

Spirit. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Gal. ii. 20.) No thought of maintaining his religious reputation crossed his mind; he was crucified with Christ. The end of man in the flesh in the death of Christ was a great experimental reality in his soul. He was, by the Spirit, in perfect harmony with God as to this great fact. CHRIST was his object and his life.

Let us turn now to Gal. iv. 4-6. "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." Here we find the Holy Ghost presented as

THE SPIRIT OF SONSHIP.

The great thought of God in sending forth His Son was "that we might receive the adoption of sons"—that we might receive the position of sonship as a gift. He would have us before Him for ever in perfect suitability to His own love. The way we come into it is, "For ye are all the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus." (Gal. iii. 26.) It is by faith that we apprehend Christ Jesus, the risen and glorified One in whom God has found the eternal satisfaction of His love, and "in Christ Jesus" we are sons. This is entirely outside everything that we are as men and women in this world—outside all religious, social, and natural distinctions. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither

male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. iii. 28.) Our place in sonship is outside everything here. "In Christ Jesus" we are in perfect suitability to the thoughts and love of God. Very soon we shall be conformed to the image of His Son in glory; but in the meantime "God has sent out the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father."

The Holy Ghost is given to us to be the Spring in our hearts of affections that are proper to that heavenly scene where Christ is, and to the relationship of sons. He is "a well of water leaping up into everlasting life." He is here to fill our hearts with the deep, divine joys of this heavenly relationship. We are not yet in the circumstances or condition suitable to sonship, but we have the Spirit of sonship in our hearts. And these heavenly affections formed in our souls separate us from this present evil world, and are the practical power by which alone we can "walk even as He walked." The way in which those heavenly affections would form us practically here we may learn in divine perfection in Him. Take Psalm xvi. "The saints that are in the earth, and the excellent, in whom is all my delight." It is a mark of decline when one ceases to regard the saints as the excellent of the earth. If you begin to find fault with the saints, and to shun your brethren, it is a very bad sign. "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup . . . the lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." HE found *everything* in God; He had no other portion, nor did He desire any. "My flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hades;

neither wilt thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life." He gives up the earth—accepting death here—and looks for life in another scene. "In Thy presence is fulness of joy." He has entered into it now as risen and glorified. He is out of all the sorrow and contrariety in a scene where divine affections flow unhindered, and God has sent the Spirit of that risen and glorified One into our hearts to bring those affections there, that in liberty and joy we may cry, "Abba, Father." What transcendent grace!

The Galatians had lost all thought of sonship, if they had ever had it, and had fallen into legal bondage. In their hearts and consciences they were *servants*, not *sons*. A servant is in the house conditionally; he is there on the ground of responsibility; if he fails he may be turned out. But a son is there unconditionally; he is there on the ground of unchangeable relationship and affection. Jesus said, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." (John viii. 36.) It is blessed, indeed, to have the liberty and affections of sonship brought into our hearts now by the Holy Ghost.

I should like to say a few words now on the importance of

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT.

"If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." (Gal. v. 25, 16.) This is the only way of holiness. To walk in the Spirit requires real purpose of heart, because there are ten thousand things that will divert us if we allow them. We

ought to feel that our portion is too precious to lose—that we cannot afford to be robbed of our heavenly joys by gratifying the flesh—that we prize our spiritual possessions too highly to give them up for the beggarly things of the world.

The Spirit has His own line, and it is as our thoughts and affections are on that line that we "walk in the Spirit." I used often to pass a water-wheel at the side of a railway which reminded me of some believers. In dry weather the stream of water used to fall short of the wheel, and in wet weather it went right over without touching it. The wheel was only *occasionally* in the current. It will not do for us to be like that, because if we are not walking in the Spirit we are in some way or other fulfilling the lusts of the flesh. There is no movement for God in our souls except as we walk in the Spirit. As He controls and forms our affections we are kept moving on with God, and are sustained in superiority to all the lusts of the flesh. Let us see to it that we abide in the current.

The result of walking in the Spirit is that

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

will be developed in us. "Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." (Gal. v. 22.) The character of Christ—all those graces which are delightful to God when found in the midst of a world of evil—is thus developed in the saints. All this fruit came out in Him in absolute perfection when He was here; now it comes out, by the Spirit, in the whole company of God's children. It takes the whole church to display that lovely cluster of fruit. It is a blessed thing to have it developed in us as the

present result of our affections being under the sway of the Spirit.

But for this there must be

SOWING TO THE SPIRIT.

"For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." (Gal. vi. 8.) I am afraid we often lose sight of this. We cannot harbour what is of the flesh—we cannot entertain or make provision for it—without suffering. If you indulge the flesh you have to pay dearly for it. A little bit of fleshly gratification may cost you a lifetime of sorrow. The believer who listlessly turns over the leaves of his Bible, and finds it dry and profitless—who attempts in vain to pray—is probably reaping the fruit of some sowing to his flesh. Perhaps he has been in worldly company, or reading worldly literature. Depend upon it, God has a reckoning with His children about such things.

How blessed, on the other hand, to sow to the Spirit. If you want the infinite joy of eternal life in your soul now, you may have it by sowing to the Spirit. As we refuse the flesh and pursue the things of the Spirit we shall undoubtedly "of the Spirit reap life everlasting." He will conduct our hearts into the circle of divine affections; He will lead us into the knowledge of the Father and the Son; He will cause us to reap even here the joys of heaven.

Seeing, then, that we have received the Spirit to put us in harmony with God's thoughts and affections, may we recognize and honour Him, taking heed to the admonition, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

(Eph. iv. 30.) To tell a lie, to steal, to indulge bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, or malice will grieve the Spirit. Foolish talking or jesting will grieve Him. (See Eph. iv. 25–v. 4.) But there is one thing that grieves Him in a peculiar way. Let me illustrate it by supposing that you had just got a letter from one you dearly love in a distant land, the contents of which quite absorb your heart. You happen to know someone who is deeply indebted to your absent friend, and you conclude he will be as interested in the tidings as yourself. You carry the letter to him and begin to read it, but to your surprise and sorrow it seems to awaken no interest in his heart. He looks at the clock, yawns, goes out of the room on every pretext, and eventually pleads an engagement and takes himself off altogether. Would you not be grieved? It would make you sad to find that there was no response where you expected, and had every reason to expect, to find one. Alas! the Spirit of God is often grieved in this way. He has come down from Christ in glory, and His mission is to testify of Him and to glorify Him. He is, we may reverently say, absorbed and filled with His wondrous theme, but what kind of response and interest does He find in those to whom He would speak of the absent One? I do not think anything could grieve the Spirit more acutely than indifference to His precious ministry of Christ in glory. One may lead a blameless life outwardly, and yet be continually grieving the Spirit of God. May each of our hearts be exercised as to these things, and so set upon Christ that we may not be found grieving or hindering the Spirit who is given to us.

THE DAYSPRING FROM ON HIGH.

LUKE ii. 7–40.

THERE is a peculiar sweetness about the gospel by Luke. It is pre-eminently the Gospel of Grace. Written by a Gentile who was the companion of Paul —the Apostle of the Gentiles—I believe it contains a presentation of the gospel as, in a special way, God would have it to be made known to the Gentiles. This is not fanciful, because the gospel is addressed to a Gentile—Theophilus—whose name means "Lover of God," and no doubt the Holy Ghost indicated thus that this gospel has special claims upon the attention of Gentile "lovers of God."

This gospel is the unfolding of the dispensation of Grace. In its opening chapters we have the dawn of a new day, as it is said, "The Dayspring from on high hath visited us." (Chap. i. 77.) A day of heavenly light and blessing has dawned upon this dark, lost world, and the Gentile "lover of God" is to "know the certainty of these things."

In this gospel every blessing is wholly of God, and therefore purely of *grace*, and the only link that man has with it is *faith*. Hence the gospel opens by a striking contrast between Zacharias and Mary—unbelief and faith. Zacharias, a type of the Jew, reasons

and doubts, with the result that he is dumb until the period of faith is ended. He completely failed both as a witness and a worshipper until the time of faith ended; that is, until John was born. Zacharias at the beginning of the gospel history and Thomas at the end both set before us the guilty, reasoning unbelief that often clings even to saints. They both failed as witnesses and worshippers all through what was typical of the period of faith. The Jews are exactly in this position. A dispensation has begun in which sight and sense are nothing, and faith is everything: as the Scripture says, "*Faith* is come." (Gal. iii. 25.) The Jews have not got faith, and therefore they are dumb, as Psalm lxv. says, "*Praise is silent* for Thee, O God, in Sion."

It is well for us to remember that we are living in a period when every blessing is of pure *grace*, and can only be apprehended by *faith*. Mary sets forth the blessedness of faith. (See chap. i. 45.) She does not reason; she anticipates no difficulty; her spirit rejoices in God her Saviour; she enters into the character of the new day which was just dawning; she knows that men of low degree are to be exalted, and the hungry are to be filled with good things. How truly do we speak of her as "the blessed virgin"! The new day of grace had lighted up her heart, and there was not a cloud of unbelief to dim the joy of her happy spirit.

You will notice, too, that in this gospel we have not visions and dreams as in Matthew. The communications come directly from heaven, and they relate to a new order of things in which heaven delights—an order of things in which everything is of God—

connected with a Person who is not only the Seed of the woman, but the Second Man out of heaven.

Think of the moment! God waited until the legal heir to David's throne was an obscure carpenter in a Galilean village; a descendant of Ishmael reigned in Judea as a vassal of Roman power; and the religion of the day was characterized by total ignorance of God's purposes and grace. Just at that time the Son of the Highest was born into the world in obscurity, in weakness, and surrounded by circumstances which made it impossible for anything but heavenly-given faith to recognize Him. God began the dispensation of grace by setting aside every conceivable thought and opinion that men might have as to the way in which He would act. The natural man would never expect to find the greatest actings of God where there was nothing to be seen but the greatest weakness and the deepest poverty. Do not think that the inn-keeper of Bethlehem was worse than his fellows. The same company would have the same reception at any other inn in any other town. As someone had said, "An inn is the place where a man is measured—the best rooms for the rich, the worst for the poor." Measured thus by man's standards of reason, common-sense, and self-interest, the comfort of a stable, the corner of a manger, was all that the Son of the Highest was worthy of. There was no prospect of earthly gain in receiving Him, and therefore there was "no room" for Him.

That scene at Bethlehem is only a little picture of the world at large, and of each individual. There was a time in the history of everyone here to-night when there was no room for Christ in the little world of

your own heart. The reception of Christ offered you no worldly advantage, it gave you no prospect of earthly gain, and therefore you had no appreciation of Him whatever.

Such being the case, how does it come to pass that anyone in this world ever gets a right appreciation of Him? John the Baptist uttered a great truth in connection with this dispensation when he said, "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven" (John iii. 27); and elsewhere the Lord said, "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto Me." (John vi. 45.) These shepherds supply the first and one of the most striking instances of this truth. It was from heaven that God communicated to them the glorious fact that a Saviour was born into the world. The heavenly day was dawning, and the first glimmer of its light shone in their hearts. No tribute of earthly glory surrounded that lowly nativity, but heaven loved to herald it, and grace called these "men of low degree" to see what all the respectability and religion of the day was blind to. There were men of "high degree" sitting in Moses' and Aaron's seats at Jerusalem, but God in His sovereignty passed them by and let the light of His grace shine into the hearts of these poor shepherds. Beloved friends, it is not the greatness or the religion of man that commends him to the grace of God. God looks upon men in relation to their *need*, and the more sensible they are of need the more are they suited to His grace.

The first thing heralded from heaven was the announcement of a SAVIOUR. "Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour which is

Christ the Lord." A needy sinner must begin with a Saviour. Is there one such here to-night? Have you a desire to know the Lord Jesus Christ? Does your heart turn to Him in any way? If so, the movement in your soul had its source in the same grace that provided a Saviour for you. The Saviour came from heaven, and the desire to know Him comes thence also. Thank God! that precious Saviour is *for you.* In the matchless glory of His Person—in the deep perfection and eternal efficacy of His work—in the infinite love of His heart—He is *for you.* See Him *here* in the humiliation of matchless grace! Trace the footprints of His love by Sychar's lonely well, in the Pharisee's house, amid the throngs of need-oppressed sinners, right on to Gethsemane and Calvary! As you see Him thus seeking the lost, does not your heart rejoice to know that grace makes you welcome to *such* a Saviour, and that *whosoever* believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life? Then believe in Him NOW, and

"Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream,
All the fitness He requireth
Is to know your need of Him!
This He gives you:
'T is the Spirit's rising beam!"

The announcement of A SAVIOUR is the occasion for heaven to join in a chorus of praise in which the whole result of Christ's coming into the world is celebrated.

"GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST!"

The first and greatest result of Christ coming into the world was that God was glorified in the scene where

sin had dishonoured Him. Christ came into all the circumstances and responsibilities in which the first man had completely and continuously dishonoured God, and filled up the whole compass of man's responsibility with absolute perfection.

Then think of what was at stake when as the Victim He hung upon the cross! *We* had a great stake in that work: our salvation was at stake. Two men were at work on a lofty building in London, when one of them looked down to the pavement far beneath and said to his mate, "Jim, there are only two inches between us and damnation," referring to the plank on which they stood. *We* can look down to the depths of hell and say that there is nothing between *us* and damnation but "a Saviour which is Christ the Lord." Take away His precious blood—His finished work—and nothing could save us from dropping into hell. Yes! *we* have a great stake in the atoning work of Calvary!

But let us not forget that God had a far greater stake in that work than we had. Sin was a challenge to His majesty, a tarnish upon the glory of His throne, a dishonour to His name, and an insult to His nature. When that blessed Victim hung upon the cross the glory of God's name and nature in respect to sin was staked upon Him, and with a glorious result. The work is accomplished which has established the glory of God in imperishable splendour for ever. His counsels and purposes rest now upon the secure basis of redemption, and He is indebted for His glory to the same Person to whom we owe our salvation. If I think of all that I was as a guilty child of Adam, I can look to the cross and say, "That wondrous work

has not only cleared me of every charge, but the Holy God against whom I have sinned has been glorified about all that I have done and all that I was." "Glory to God in the highest!"

"ON EARTH PEACE."

There never was, from the moment of the fall, such a thing as peace on earth until this blessed Babe was born. Before the fall there was the peace of innocence without a jarring note in all creation; but sin came in and reduced the harmony to discord, and from that moment until Luke ii. there was no "peace on earth."

This peace may be considered in three ways:—

1. The Son of the Highest was here upon earth—the blessed, perfect One whose every motive and desire was exactly in accord with the will of God. He could speak about "My peace." *His* peace was found in having no will of His own. He walked under the yoke of God's will in unbroken rest and peace. He could answer the most cutting rejection—the most adverse circumstance—with a peaceful, "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight." But He was *alone* in that circle of peace. Peter, James and John—much beloved as they were—were not in it. How often *they* were ruffled and perturbed!

2. But the moment came when He could say, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you." The circle of peace was going to be enlarged. This could only be on the ground of His death, for the first man could never give up his own will: to do so would be to give up his very existence. But the death of Christ is—judicially, and for faith—the end of that man, and the Christian walking in the Spirit owns him no more.

The believer can thus—and only thus—have freedom from sin as he reckons himself to have died to sin, and to be alive to God in Christ Jesus. Then, as free, he yields himself unto God as one alive from the dead. He presents his body a living sacrifice unto God, and proves what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Thus walking, the peace of Christ becomes an experimental reality in the heart of the Christian. Oh, what a gift! Think of the blessed serenity of spirit with which He passed through the world, doing the will of God, and then weigh the words once more, "MY PEACE I GIVE UNTO YOU"! And do not forget that this is for *earth*, where every disturbing element is present; there will not be the same need for it in heaven, where

> "No stain within; no foes, or snares around;
> No jarring notes shall there discordant sound;
> All pure without, all pure within the breast;
> No thorns to wound, no toil to mar our rest."

It is on earth that we need, and may have, Christ's peace. Do you know anything of this peace, my brother, my sister? It is not a dreamy speculation in the clouds. It is an experimental reality, and if as one alive from the dead in Christ Jesus you accept His yoke you will have His peace. It is your birthright—the portion which His love bestows.

3. Then there will be "peace on earth" in the millennial day. The ruthless, wicked will of man will be set aside; the swords beaten into ploughshares and the spears into pruning hooks, and the Prince of Peace will reign. Peace will be universal then. I need hardly say that it is an infinitely greater thing to be in peace amid sin's confusion, and in spite of all

the storm waves of adverse circumstances which beat around us now.

"GOOD PLEASURE IN MEN."

If we think of the wondrous fact that the eternal Son of God has become a man, we cannot fail to see that He must be a Man in whom God would find "good pleasure." Of the past eternity He could say, "I was daily His delight," and what He was from eternity necessarily gave character to what He became as Man upon the earth. Hence He is called "the Second Man out of Heaven." (1 Cor. xv. 47.) The first man was made *of* the earth and *for* the earth; the Second Man was One who had been in heaven, who belonged to heaven, and who was ever in spirit there. As it has often been said, He was a man of an entirely new order—a man in whom God could find all His delight. God has found "good pleasure" in a Man.

Think of the contrast! When the first man came in view "it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart," and the flood was the solemn testimony that the judgment of God was upon "all flesh." When the Second Man was in view, God opened the heaven and declared, "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased." Thank God! we are no longer linked with the first man but with the Second. The man in whom God could find no pleasure was ended at the cross. The death of Christ has severed all our links with Adam, and the Holy Ghost now links us with Christ risen and glorified. We are His companions. "Both He which sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call

them brethren." The same love and good pleasure which rested upon Him rests upon us. God has "*good pleasure in men.*"

Has this glorious truth become a reality in your soul? Has your heart fed upon the death of Christ as that which has severed your links with Adam, that you might become a member of a new race—linked up with Christ risen and glorified? You are not only forgiven and cleansed, but an object of delight to God and the Father as He looks upon you in all the acceptance and beauty of the Blessed Person who put away your sins and with whom you have died. God has "good pleasure in men."

Heaven was celebrating all this, while as yet there was nothing to see but a Babe in a manger. The work which was the basis of it all was not done for three and thirty years, but the presence of that Babe on earth was the pledge to heaven of the sure accomplishment of every purpose and delight of God's heart.

Now I want you to notice the different persons who are mentioned in this chapter, because I think that they illustrate the *characteristics of faith in the dispensation of grace.*

First, we find some people who say (*v.* 15), "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us." The heavenly communication found a response in the faith of their hearts. There was *nothing* in that matchless scene to human sight or reason, but there was *everything* for heaven and *everything* for faith. These men were content to leave their own things—their duties, their possessions, all that was naturally and rightly their object upon earth

—because they were so charmed by the revelation of heaven's delight in ONE who to the eyes of men was utterly insignificant. The heavenly glory which shone upon them had thrown earthly things into the shade. Oh, that it might be so with ourselves!

There is a moral journey which answers to the literal journey of the shepherds. Have you ever taken it? Has your heart been attracted to the Person of the Son of God who thus came down in the humiliation of matchless grace to be the Saviour of sinful men? Have you ever gone by faith to Bethlehem to find the peace of your conscience and the joy of your heart in that lowly, heavenly Saviour? Have you found HIM to be *everything*—all your salvation and all your desire? Have you in heart and spirit left earthly things because HE has eclipsed them all? If so, I am sure you can understand in measure the effect produced upon these shepherds. "They returned glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen." They went back to their duties and occupations in this life with full hearts. They had found a joy greater than all the gladness of the earth, and they went back into the trying circumstances and difficulties of every-day life with that joy so filling their hearts that they were "glorifying and praising God." They had not received a single earthly blessing, and yet their cup was running over; they were enriched in faith beyond expression.

Next, in verse 25, we have a man WAITING and WATCHING, and it is remarkable how much is said of the Holy Ghost in connection with him. "The Holy Ghost was upon him": "it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost": "He came by the Spirit into the

temple." Then he was not looking for death, but for a Coming Person who already filled his heart. And, lastly, he had no desire to remain in a scene where Christ was to be rejected. What a beautiful picture of a Christian!

Because of the value of Christ's work the Holy Ghost seals and indwells every believer. In the cleansing of the leper the oil was put upon the blood. When our faith laid hold of the value of Christ's work, and we believed on Him as the risen One who had accomplished everything for us, we were sealed by the Holy Ghost. I am sure that we have a very feeble sense of the greatness of this blessed fact and its consequences. The Holy Ghost would do wonderful things for us if we did not hinder and grieve Him. He would make us practically free from the lust of the flesh (see Gal. v. 16), and would give us the abiding consciousness that we are the objects of God's love. (Rom. viii. 14-16.) The result would be that we should walk every day and all the day long in liberty and joy as the sons of God. Is it so with us, my brethren?

Simeon was led by the Spirit and did not miss his opportunity. Do *you* ever miss opportunities? The Holy Ghost never does. He led Simeon to the right place just at the right moment. I believe if we were more subject to the control of the Spirit of God our experience of His leading would be much more distinct and habitual.

Then, it was revealed unto Simeon by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. The Holy Ghost would fain detach our hearts from this present evil age, and occupy them

with the One who is coming. The Christian—taught by the Holy Ghost—does not look for death; much less does he expect things to improve either in the world or the Church: he is *waiting* and *watching* for a Person from heaven.

Further, nothing is more striking than Simeon's utterance when at last he held the infant Saviour in his arms. The Messiah was truly there—the One whom a Jew would naturally look upon as having come to set everything right on the earth. Yet he says, "Lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace." "What! *depart* from the place where the Messiah is?" "Yes!" "Why?" "Because I know he will be rejected here, and I don't want to have a place where he has none." Ah! Simeon, you are far ahead of many Christians in the nineteenth century!

Now, just a word about Anna and her WITNESS FOR CHRIST. She was of the tribe of Aser, and a lovely illustration she presents of the blessing of her tribe. "Let him dip his foot in oil. Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days thy strength." Think of this dear old woman having gone through a wilderness journey of over a hundred years without being footsore or crippled. She was still active, whether to *go in* as a WORSHIPPER or to *go out* as a WITNESS. God knows how to equip His people for a rough journey. Thorns and stones and burning desert sand won't hurt you if your foot is dipped in oil and you wear shoes of iron and brass. In type it is walking in the Spirit, and having the strength and endurance which faith imparts.

Anna's affections were in the current of God's acting. She had read that the Lord would come

suddenly to His Temple, and she tarried there, sustained through the long years by the strength and patience born of faith. Then that lovely word was verified in her experience—"As thy days thy strength." In nature as we get older we get weaker. The blessing promised to Aser was that as they got older they were to be stronger. It corresponds, I think, to Prov. iv. 18, "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth *more and more* unto the perfect day." Anna's last days were her strongest and her brightest days. Beloved, we should look for this—a continual advance and increase of light and strength—not, indeed, as to the outward man, but as to the inward, being renewed day by day.

She "SPAKE OF HIM to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." Who would have thought of sending such a missionary into the most religious city on earth? The first WITNESS FOR CHRIST—the first MISSIONARY OF GRACE in Jerusalem—a widow over a hundred years old! When it is a question of *witness for Christ* man's strength and abilities go for nothing, and FIDELITY to His blessed name and Person is everything. Her fidelity had kept her for long years in the Temple—the devoted handmaiden of the Lord. The same fidelity had drawn out the affections of her heart to the beloved remnant who looked for redemption. She was no mystic, wrapped up in her own spirituality. Her heart had busied itself to find out "ALL them that looked for redemption," and now at the fitting moment she went forth to speak to them of HIM.

"She spake of HIM!" That is our mission. We have found the answer to all our need in that blessed

Person. Would to God that He was more practically *everything* to our hearts! We are left in the world that rejected Him to speak of Him. Thank God there are—through His grace—empty, longing, needy hearts in this world—hearts that are sick of the pleasures and weary of the bondage of sin—hearts that cannot be satisfied with the empty shell of the Temple-ritual. Thousands, too, of His own who long to know him better, are waiting for the "word in season." Oh, that we may have our own hearts filled first, and then go forth—whether it be to saint or sinner—to SPEAK OF HIM!

GRACE TRIUMPHANT.

LUKE iv. 14-30; v. 1-29.

I SHOULD like to bring before you four things which are strikingly presented in these chapters, viz:—

1. GRACE PROCLAIMED.
2. GRACE ILLUSTRATED.
3. GRACE REJECTED.
4. GRACE TRIUMPHANT.

First of all, it is my earnest desire that our hearts may be attracted by the glories and perfections of the One who is the Proclaimer of Grace. In chapter iii. we see how He was sealed with the Holy Ghost as the object of God's delight. The whole of His matchless life from the manger to the baptismal waters of Jordan was covered by the Father's "*well pleased.*" It could not be otherwise, for from His conception by the Holy Ghost He was the true Meat offering, the "fine flour mingled with oil." In connection with this I may say that there were three distinct forms in which the meat offering was prepared. (Lev. ii.) It might be "baken in the oven," or "in a pan," or "in the frying-pan." The increasing severity of the tests to which the personal devotedness of the Lord Jesus would be subjected seems to be indicated

thus. The first might cover the thirty years of His private life; the second might apply to the three years and a half of His ministry; while the third might have reference to that last awful time of trial in which the personal devotedness of that blessed One was tested to the full—that dreaded hour of the power of darkness preceding and including the cross. How blessed to know that in every way and at every point that precious Life was "a sweet savour unto the Lord"! Every test only served to display the divine excellence and perfection of that Holy One; and, as we have seen, God sealed Him as the One in whom He was "well pleased."

Then in the wilderness He meets the Tempter, who plies all the arts of his evil wisdom in vain. Foiled at every point, the enemy retires. The "strong man armed" who had so long kept his palace, was at last bound by a Stronger than he. Grace has come into the world *in a Person whom Satan cannot touch.* What a glorious thought! Responsibility came into the world in connection with a man whom Satan could touch, and who fell, I may say, at the first touch, dragging down all his race with him into ruin and death. GRACE has come in connection with a MAN who stands invulnerable and invincible before all the assaults of Satan, who retires vanquished and weaponless from the conflict.

Let us dwell, beloved brethren, with adoring hearts on the glories of the Person who is the Proclaimer of Grace! It is a Man who is the beloved Son of God; who is sealed with the Holy Ghost as the Object of God's delight, and who has met and silenced

the whole battery of Satan's wiles; who stands up in the synagogue at Nazareth to proclaim that the day of grace had begun. HE was there—the Delight of God's heart, the Vanquisher of the devil—there to proclaim the riches, the consolation, the liberty, the unfathomable wonders of the grace that resided in His own Person, and to throw open the heavenly treasures of that grace for the use of poor, sorrowing, captive, blind sinners. Never had words so sweet fallen upon human ears before. No such Preacher had ever before been heard at Nazareth or anywhere else. No marvel that they "wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth." At last the Preacher was here of whom the prophet had said, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of HIM that bringeth good tidings!"

How sweet it is to see, too, that the grace which He proclaims is all wrapt up in His own Person! It is not *blessings* only which are presented, but a BLESSER. He says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon ME"; "He hath anointed ME"; "He hath sent ME." Let me put it to your hearts, my brethren! Do you think of, and rejoice in, your blessings more than the Person in whom you have them? If you only think of blessings there is a wonderful charm about them when they are new, and they sustain the soul for a certain time, but when the first joy of them passes away, a "settling down" process commences. Every new bit of blessing may seem to put a new bit of life into you, but it gradually loses its lustre and power, and you become what I fear I must speak of as an "ordinary" Christian—you make no progress. It is as we take the Person of Christ by

faith into the affections of our hearts that we make spiritual progress. It is as He occupies an enlarged place in our affections that we get on. The devil often deceives us by filling our heads while he empties our hearts. The head may be filled with theological information without producing one spark of heart-affection for Christ, and the soul remains in a state of spiritual starvation. All the blessings of the Dispensation of Grace are wrapt up in a Person, and we make progress as our hearts learn to find everything in Him—the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us.

I can only touch briefly at present the fivefold blessing of Grace which is here proclaimed.

1. "To preach the gospel to the poor." We were poor indeed. We were debtors to an enormous amount and we had "nothing to pay." God has expended the riches of His grace to meet our need. Rich men spend their riches in different ways: God spends *His* riches in clearing away everything that stood against the poor sinners who believe on His Son. "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Eph. i. 7.) And not only does that grace meet all our need, but it enriches us with eternal blessings such as only the heart of God could think of.

2. "To heal the brokenhearted." Here is a man brokenhearted! Why? Because everything that his heart was set upon has been blighted. He says, "I set my heart first on one thing and then another, but something has come in to spoil it all, and my heart is crushed and desponding." The grace of God would bring healing to that broken heart. There is

everlasting "consolation and good hope through grace," and by faith in the Son of God it may be yours. There is a Person who can save you from all your sins, and sympathise with all your sorrows, and support you in all your weakness, and make His love the portion of your heart. Is not such a Person worth knowing? Oh, the comfort and the joy of knowing that God is for us: that His blessed Son has been here and subjected Himself to every indignity that He might tell us of eternal blessings, and secure them for us by His own death! The blessings which Jesus gives to those who believe on Him are connected with a world that never knows any changes or any disappointments—a blessed world of joy and peace and glory—and Grace would bring the things of that world into your heart, and it would be bound up and healed.

3. "To preach deliverance to the captives." Every person on this earth out of Christ is a captive. Some have very rough iron chains, and others have beautiful golden ones, but all are captives. A man may say, "I am not a captive; I do just as I like; I am my own master." Yes! you are the slave of your own will, and behind that will is all the power of the devil. If you desired to live a holy life you would soon find what a captive you were. The chain which now hangs so lightly would become awfully galling if you tried to escape from it. It is only by obtaining life in Christ Jesus, and having the Holy Ghost as the power of that life, that you can be free from the power of sin.

4. "Recovering of sight to the blind." How many blind people there are! The grace of God shines upon them; His beloved Son passes before them; salvation

with all its blessings is put before their eyes; but they cannot see these precious things. The grace that brings the blessing has also to give the sinner eyes to see it.

> "Else, sweetly as it suits our case,
> The gift had been in vain."

FAITH is spiritual sight. It enables us to see things which to nature are invisible—the riches and the glory of the Grace of God. We were once blind to these things: for ever let us praise the Saviour who has opened our eyes!

5. "To set at liberty them that are bruised." These are the captives who have lain in the dungeon so long that the irons have eaten into their flesh, and they are helplessly maimed—worn out in the service of the devil. Anybody else but the Son of God would give them up, but there is grace in *His* heart for them. One day George Whitfield said in his preaching that the Lord Jesus would receive the devil's castaways. Afterwards some of his lady friends objected to the expression, but while they were talking about it there was a knock at the door; a woman was asking if she might see Mr. Whitfield. He went to her; she stood before him trembling—a poor, utterly wasted creature from the London streets, worn out in the devil's service. Through her sobs and tears she said, "Mr. Whitfield, I heard you say that the Lord Jesus would take in the devil's castaways, and I am one of them. Will He receive me?" The preacher and the penitent knelt together before the God of all grace, and He spoke peace to her troubled conscience on the spot. Oh! how ofttimes we limit the grace of our God by our cold-hearted unbelief!

All this wondrous blessing is proclaimed in the Dispensation of grace, which is here called "the acceptable year of the Lord." What an unfolding of the Grace which has come into this poor fallen world in the person of the Son of God!

But it is not enough that GRACE is PROCLAIMED: it must also be ILLUSTRATED. These sinners at Nazareth could appreciate the *doctrine* of Grace, and "wonder at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth." A sermon about the grace of God *in general* would be tolerated anywhere, but the Lord Jesus did not leave the matter thus. He would have them to know what the character of GRACE really was, and on what terms they might receive it. So He brings forward from the Scriptures two illustrations of Grace. Some people don't like illustrations, because they often come home to the heart and take a grip on the conscience, while doctrines fly over the head. These people at Nazareth did not like illustrations, especially when they make it so plain that Grace would bless a poor Sidonian widow or a Syrian leper if it choose to do so, without considering that the widows and lepers of Israel had any previous claim. These people were not prepared to allow God to be gracious when His grace was shown in its activity. If the children of Israel had fulfilled their side of the covenant they might, indeed, have claimed much from God, but their whole history had proved them to be as bad as their guilty neighbours, and more criminal because having more light. GRACE can only act on the ground that all are alike in deserving nothing. A religious Israelite could only have the blessings of Grace on the ground that he deserved nothing; and if that was so,

how could he find fault if God blessed a poor Sidonian widow or a Syrian before himself? It was purely Grace for all alike, and surely Grace had the right to choose her objects where she would!

Let us look for a moment at the illustrations. Volumes of grace and blessing are bound up in the histories of the Sidonian widow and the Syrian leper. I have no doubt that we have here—brought into the compass of three verses—an epitome of what Grace will do for its objects.

You remember the condition in which the prophet found the widow — reduced to extremity — brought down to a handful of meal and a cruse of oil! reduced to a point when there was nothing between her and death but that which typified Christ and the Holy Ghost. It is a blessed thing to be reduced to that point. David was brought to a point when he had to say, "There is but a step between me and death." Have *you* been brought to realize that if Christ and the Holy Ghost were taken away there is *nothing* between you and death? When you reach that point you will find that you need nothing more. Christ known by the Holy Ghost as a Saviour is all you need. The Lord God of Israel said, "The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth." The time of famine and need is the time of Grace, and that grace will never fail its objects until the famine is over. By-and-bye there will be a Dispensation of Righteousness, when the earth will be mown by the scythe of judgment, and then the King of Glory will "come down as rain upon the mown grass, and as showers that water

the earth" (Ps. lxxii. 6), and until then the meal and the oil neither waste nor fail. Christ as a Saviour, and the Holy Ghost to make Him known, is the provision of Grace for the famine of souls.

But the widow must learn that Grace goes deeper still because her need is deeper still. She must learn that Grace will not only save *from* death, but *through* death and *out of* death. Her son sickens and dies. Depend upon it, brethren, we never really learn the depths of Grace until we find ourselves under the power of death. Our sin has brought death upon us in the twofold character of the power of Satan and the judgment of God, and Grace would fail to meet our case if it did not remove us from the power of death and give us a life which death cannot touch. How this is accomplished we see in figure in the case of the widow's son. First, he was laid in the prophet's bed. Sleep is a figure of death, and the child was identified with the prophet in the place which was a figure of death. The prophet was a type of that blessed Saviour who has been—not in figure only, but in actual fact—in the place of death, and each believer has been identified with Him in His death. We have died with Christ: God has seen us identified with Christ's death, so that all that we were as children of Adam has gone out of His sight in the death of Christ. This is a glorious truth, my brethren! God has seen you laid in the prophet's bed—identified with Christ in His death. Have you seen yourself there? Have you entered into that of which baptism is a figure—that you have part in Christ's death? Have you by faith eaten the flesh and drunk the blood of the Son of man, so that you have identified yourself with His

death, and it has become part of the faith of your soul that you have died with Christ?

Then the prophet stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried to the Lord, and the soul of the child came into him again. The same striking action was repeated by Elisha in 2 Kings iv., in connection with the Shunammite's son, and I think it answers, as a type, to the action of the blessed Lord in John xx. Having passed through death, He came into the midst of His own, and breathed on them, saying, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." In the old creation God breathed into the nostrils of Adam the breath of life, and he became a living soul. In John xx. the Son of God as the last Adam associates His brethren with Himself in the possession of a life which death can never touch—a life which is in Himself, and which He gives to all who believe on Him. Have you by faith passed out of your old life as a child of Adam by having died with Christ, and entered upon a new and eternal life which is beyond all the power of death, and which is in the Son of God? This is the glorious end of sovereign grace; for we read that "where sin abounded GRACE did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might GRACE reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life, in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. v. 21.)

But another illustration is needed to complete the picture, and it is furnished by Naaman, the Syrian leper. The question might be raised, does Grace work such spiritual wonders for our souls, and do nothing for our bodies? We have got bodies with the seeds of corruption in them. It has been said we no sooner

begin to live than we begin to die. It is part of the heritage which sin has bequeathed to us that we have mortal bodies, carrying within them the seeds of disease, decay, and death. This condition of things was strikingly exemplified in Naaman. His body was corrupted by a disease which perhaps more plainly than any other stamps the body as being "mortal." The leper sees his members eaten away until they drop off; his whole existence is a living death; he manifests plainly the condition to which sin has reduced man's body. Is there to be no remedy for this? Is Grace going to bestow infinite blessings on the soul and leave the body to be the spoil of corruption? Never! Seven times plunged beneath the waters of Jordan, and the flesh of the leper becomes as that of a little child. His body was rescued from the corruption which attached to it through faith in that which typified the death of Christ.

Let me assure you that the triumph of Grace will never be complete until our bodies partake of the efficacy of Christ's death, and are entirely freed from what Scripture calls "the bondage of corruption." This will be when the Lord returns. The bodies of God's saints which have been sown in weakness and dishonour and corruption during the last six thousand years will be raised in power and glory and incorruption. As for us who are living when the Lord comes, the power by which He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself will be put forth upon us, and in the twinkling of an eye we shall be *changed*. These vile bodies will be fashioned like unto His glorious body, and as we rise to meet Him in the air "we shall be *like Him*, for we shall see Him as He is." The

"many brethren" will be fully conformed to the image of the Son of God—Himself the Firstborn among them. And, remember, GRACE does all this. You will find all that I have spoken of attributed to God's "own purpose and *grace*" (2 Tim. i, 9, 10), according to which death has been abolished and *life* and *incorruptibility* brought to light by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

If blessing is on the ground of grace it could not be admitted that the privileged Israelite had any more claim to it than a condemned Sidonian or "a Syrian ready to perish," and God chose to vindicate the sovereignty of His grace by blessing these outcasts, and He does so still. He passes by the pretensions of men and blesses the needy. He fills the hungry with good things, but the rich He sends empty away. Is this the Grace that you delight in? or do you think that God should have some respect to your goodness, your morality, or your religion? Alas! man's goodness and religion always make him hate grace. I will venture to say that these sinners at Nazareth had not too much religion, but they had enough to make them hate Grace.

GRACE PROCLAIMED and ILLUSTRATED becomes Grace REJECTED. When Grace is set before the natural man he hates it. He cannot understand why God should bless the Sidonians and the Syrians—the publicans and sinners of society. The respectable man can see that *they* have no claim upon God for anything, and, deceived by his own heart, he will not own that he is as bad and as undeserving as they, and he hates the Grace which will not acknowledge his goodness in any way, but will bless *them* in spite of their badness.

That synagogue at Nazareth was a little picture of the moral and religious world. They were all "filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust Him out of the city, and led Him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong." What were they so angry about? *Grace.* What were they rejecting? *Grace.* The scene on the brow of that hill was a foreshadowing of another scene which occurred on the brow of another hill three years later. *Calvary* is the religious world's answer to *Grace.* Man reasons thus, "If these poor, wretched outcasts are to get God's blessing and I am to miss it, all my goodness, morality, and religion go for nothing." Exactly! "Why," says the religious man, "that is preposterous. Away with such doctrine. The man who preaches that doctrine is not fit to live." That is what the religious world thought in the first century, and the religious world thinks so still in the nineteenth. Let me ask, are *you* a poor, needy, sinful receiver of Grace? Is Grace the sweetest sound that ever reached your ears? Or are you a moral, respectable, religious hater of GRACE? Sad is the condition of the man who is *too good for Grace!*

As we have seen, the natural man will not have Grace. When examples of its activity are set before him he hates it. There is not one responsive echo in the heart of man to Grace. We were all in that condition by nature. Then how does it come to pass that any are saved? It is only by the glorious *triumph* of the very grace that man rejects, and in Luke v. we have a fourfold picture of GRACE TRIUMPHANT.

1. First, we find Grace *convicting a man of his sin.*

A great many fish were caught that day, but the triumph of grace was that the fisherman was caught. A great miracle had been wrought in his house before; he had also heard a sermon from the Lord Jesus, but neither of these things appears to have reached his conscience. Luke the physician might have seen the finger of God more plainly in the healing of the sick woman, but the fisherman must be caught in his own net. *Grace adapts itself to its objects.* Probably no two persons have been converted in exactly the same way. Marvellous and varied are God's ways in producing conviction of sin! There might seem to be very little connection between a draught of fishes and a sinner's conscience, but Grace made the connection and Simon found himself at once in the presence of God. Immediately we have a striking contrast from the previous chapter. *There* the natural man is *full of wrath* and casts Jesus down; *here* grace touches a man and he finds out that he is *full of sin,* and he casts himself down before Jesus. He is convicted of sin.

Look at the delightful inconsistency of this man. He is crying out that he is utterly unfit for the Lord's presence and saying, "Depart from me"; and yet at the same moment he gets as near to Him as he can. Grace was drawing him with a magnetic power that he could not resist. The very grace that shows us we are full of sin attracts us to the Saviour. There is always *attraction* along with *conviction.* It may sound like a paradox, but no man ever really turns to God until he has learnt that he is utterly unfit for God.

2. Simon's condition—full of sin—is immediately illustrated by that of a man "full of leprosy." Such an one needs *cleansing,* and there is grace to cleanse as

well as to convict. You observe that the leper had a doubt on the subject. He did not question the *power* of that Blessed One, but he had a doubt as to His *grace*. How many there are who put an "if" before the Saviour's grace, if not before His power. Doubting soul, listen to this royal word of Grace Triumphant—"I WILL; BE THOU CLEAN." This is the voice of Calvary. For thy cleansing this blessed Saviour was there made sin, and poured out His soul unto death. There His precious blood which cleanseth from all sin was shed, and Grace makes all the value of that death and blood available for thee. The Saviour crowned with glory at the right hand of God is the triumphant Witness to the value and completeness of His own finished work, and both the cross and the throne re-echo that precious word to every sinner who believes on Him—"I will; be thou clean."

3. Next we have a man who is *cleansed*—the Lord Jesus pronounces his sins forgiven—but there was no evidence of it to the people round about him, and *they* did not believe that he was cleansed. The Lord says, "That *ye* may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, He said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house." The grace that cleanses *confers power* upon the cleansed sinner to walk to the glory of God, and his walk becomes the evidence of his cleansing to others. When a person believes in the Lord Jesus for the remission of his sins, he receives the Holy Ghost (Acts x. 43, 44), who empowers him to walk to the glory of God. In the case of this man the very thing which was the witness to his weakness became the witness to his

power. The point in which a man's weakness was most apparent in his unconverted days is the point which will most markedly show the power of the Spirit of God when he gets deliverance. People may deny that our sins are forgiven, but they ought not to be able to deny that an unaccountable change has taken place in us, and thus our walk would become the witness to the power and reality of the Grace that has reached us.

4. GRACE convicts, cleanses, and confers power, and when we are thus personally displaying the power of Grace we are morally fitted to minister it to others. Grace does not fully triumph until its subjects are brought into communion with its own thoughts of blessing for others. Levi the publican—saved by grace—is found in the *communion of grace.* He is so delivered from himself that his heart goes out in love to others, and he is found doing on a small scale the very thing that God is doing on a large scale. He makes a *feast for sinners,* and in doing so he makes a feast for Him who is the Friend of publicans and sinners. Levi was in concert with the Gracious One who was—may we not reverently say it?—*well pleased* to be his Guest. I venture to say that Grace could not have a greater triumph than this. It has brought its subject into communion with itself. This is the deep joy of the Father's house . . . "It was meet that we should make merry and be glad." Alas! for the cold, selfish heart that is outside the circle of this joy. Every believer will be the subject of this grace, and in communion with it for ever in glory. But why should you not taste its deep blessedness *now?* Do not the music and the dancing awaken a responsive

echo in your heart? Does not your whole soul kindle with desire to minister to some other worthless sinner the grace that you have known for yourself? *Grace* must be active in a world of sinners, and if you are in communion with it I am sure that in some measure you are following in the steps of Levi and seeking the blessing of others. May God give us to know more of the *communion of Grace!*

From first to last all is of Grace. From the depths of conviction to the heights of communion the whole work of God in the soul is described by the two words —GRACE TRIUMPHANT.

THE ORACLE, THE ALTAR, AND THE THRONE.

2 Chron. v. 7-14; vii. 7; ix. 1-9.

IN bringing these Scriptures before you, my desire is that the glories of the Person who is the Spirit of all the Old Testament may shine upon our hearts. I know it is only as our eyes are anointed with the Spirit's unction that we can discern the glories of that Person, but I trust that each one here has received the anointing which teaches us to abide in Christ and to find everything in Him. He is here presented, in type and figure, as the One who fills the oracle, the altar, and the throne.

THE ORACLE.

For more than a hundred years the oracle had been empty; or perhaps it would be more correct to say that there had been no oracle at all, for when the ark was taken by the Philistines, God "forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which He placed among men." (Ps. lxxviii. 60.) There was no spot upon earth where God could rest—where His glory could dwell—and from which He could make Himself known, and communicate His mind. The whole order of things connected with Sinai had come to grief; the system which was set up in connection with the responsibility

of man, and whose blessings depended upon the way in which that responsibility was discharged, had ended in total failure. But God had begun a new order of things in connection with David and Zion, in which the source and spring of everything was *grace*. The great characteristic of grace is that it brings in what is of God; and everything depends on God, and therefore there is no flaw in it. To be established with grace is to have the heart brought into a circle of things which is entirely filled with perfection—that is, with *Christ*.

Here we get the oracle restored. The glory, which departed when Ichabod was born, comes back. But when? When the ark of the covenant was brought in "unto His place, to the oracle of the house." When the priests had retired, and the ark alone remained in the holy of holies, the house was filled with the cloud of glory, and it excluded everybody. "The priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud." The glory which greeted the ark to His place in the oracle of the house was a glory which excluded man in the flesh. The place was found at last concerning which faith could say, "Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest; Thou, and the ark of Thy strength"; and concerning which Jehovah could say, "This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it." (Ps. cxxxii. 8, 14.) A place where every perfection of God's nature, and every attribute of His Being, could repose in profound satisfaction, and from whence He could make Himself known, and communicate His mind and pleasure. But what occupied that holy oracle? *The ark of the covenant alone.* It was the presence of the ark, and the absence of everything else, which made that holy oracle a resting-place for the divine glory. Take away

the ark, and you might write "Ichabod" on Solomon's splendid sanctuary as plainly as it was written on the deserted tent of Shiloh. Introduce any other person, and that glory must necessarily have proved his destruction. The ark *alone* could fill that holy oracle, and make it the resting-place of the Shekinah.

What does this present to our hearts, my brethren? Does it not remind us of what we surely desire never to forget—that there has been but one Person on earth in whom the glory of God could find its rest? God created man for His own satisfaction, but from Gen. iii. "Ichabod" was written on Adam and his race, and there was no place of rest or satisfaction for God in man or in man's world. The oracle was empty; the glory was departed. But God never gives up one of His thoughts, and in due time He brought One into the world who could fill the oracle with perfection, and make a home on earth for the glory of God.

I have no doubt you have often lingered over the wondrous scene which is brought before us in Luke ii. The birth of that holy child who was "called the Son of God" brought perfection into this world for the first time since the fall, and at once we have "the glory of the Lord" greeting Him, and the heavenly host sounding forth the blessed fact that there was "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good pleasure in men." It was, in truth, the bringing in of the ark "unto His place, to the oracle of the house." The natural eye could see nothing there but a babe whose nativity was encircled by circumstances of unparalleled lowliness; but the presence of that Babe on earth made a home here for the glory of God. His presence was the pledge that every desire of God's

heart as to man should have its perfect answer. For God and for heaven—and we may add, for faith—the true Ark of the covenant was at Bethlehem; there was the oracle, and there appeared the glory-cloud.

Now let us pass for a moment from Bethlehem to Bethabara. (Luke iii. 21, 22.) The time had come for that blessed One to take His place amongst men as the Vessel of grace, and God would not suffer Him to enter on His ministry without a further and glorious testimony to His Person. The Ark is again seen in "His place in the oracle of the house." The opened heaven, the descending Spirit, the Father's voice, unite to proclaim Him as the Object of God's delight and love, and the place of God's rest. There was perfection in this world in a Man, and the glory of God could find its perfect satisfaction and rest in Him.

Before His *service* began His personal perfections were a place of rest for the divine glory. Notice the words, "There was nothing in the ark save the two tables which Moses put therein at Horeb." (2 Chron. v. 10.) At other times there had also been the priestly rod that budded, and the golden pot of manna. These things indicated what Christ is in priestly grace and service, and as food to sustain His people. But here it is not what He is in grace or service for His people, but what He is in His personal perfection for God—the One who could say, "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart." (Ps. xl. 7, 8.)

Then if we move onward to the holy mount (Luke ix. 28-36) we find Him at the end of that day of service which began at Bethabara. The only thing

remaining for Him on earth was the decease to be accomplished at Jerusalem, which formed the theme of holy converse on that mount of glory. And here again we find the ark filling His place in the oracle, and the glory resting there. It may be said, and rightly so, that Moses and Elias appeared in glory as well as Jesus. But how instructive to observe that when Peter would have regarded and retained them all in equal honour, it is expressly told us by the Spirit that he knew not what he said; and immediately thereupon the cloud of "excellent glory" appeared—the same cloud as of old filled the house of the Lord—and that glory would own and greet but *One*. "There came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son: hear Him. And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone."

In connection with that word, "hear Him," I think we get the thought of *the oracle*. The One in whom God can rest is the One who can make known all His mind. God said to Moses concerning the ark, "There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee." (Ex. xxv. 22.) "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." (Heb. i. 1, 2.) God has been perfectly declared in this world, and all His mind expressed here, in and by that blessed One; He has filled the oracle.

One lovely touch must not be passed over. "And the staves were long, so that the ends of the staves were seen outside the ark before the oracle; but they were not seen without." (2 Chron. v. 9, New Trans.) The staves were that by which the ark was carried,

and I think God would remind us thereby that the One who filled the oracle, and in whom all His glory found its perfect satisfaction, was carried along in perfect dependence at every step. If we think of Him at Bethlehem we are reminded of His words by the prophetic Spirit—"Thou didst make Me hope upon My mother's breasts. I was cast upon Thee from the womb." (Ps. xxii. 9, 10) If we look at Him at Jordan we find Him "praying." If we view Him on the holy mount He is praying there. We see "the ends of the staves," but we must be near Him in the sanctuary to understand this, and to know how perfectly He kept the place of the dependent One—"they were not seen without."

THE ALTAR.

We noticed that the glory which greeted the ark excluded everybody from the sanctuary. If God can rest in the perfections of Christ He must refuse everything that is not Christ. If this be so, a solemn and deeply-important question arises at once. It is this. If God has brought in perfection for His own heart in Christ how can all our imperfection be dealt with and removed according to His glory, so as to leave Him free to bless us according to the perfection of Christ? That question can only be answered—thank God! it is answered perfectly—*by the altar*. If Christ, in His holy life as Man upon the earth, filled the oracle, in His sufferings and death He has also filled the altar.

Before I touch upon what is specially brought before us in 2 Chronicles vii. in connection with the altar I am constrained to say a few words on what may be called *our side* of the work of the cross. Perhaps I am speaking to some timid and doubting soul who has

never known what it was to have divine peace. It may be you have analysed your feelings and reviewed your experience again and again with the greatest earnestness and sincerity, but you have never been able to find in yourself any evidence or token that would impart the longed-for peace. You have been looking altogether in the wrong direction. The Spirit of God, who has made you anxious, would now turn your eyes away from yourself, and even from His operations in you, *to the work of Christ for you.* Let me read you some precious words as to the object and efficacy of that work. "His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree." (1 Peter ii. 24.) "Jesus our Lord . . . who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." (Rom. iv. 24, 25.) "When He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." (Heb. i. 3.) "This Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool. For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us. . . . Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." (Heb. x. 12, 17.) The sins of all believers were remembered at the cross, and dealt with there in holy judgment according to the divine glory; and God has testified by His Spirit in the Scriptures that He will remember them no more. What a complete expiation. What perfect peace and assurance for the believer.

Then there is another who says, "But my difficulty is not that. It is not *what I have done* that troubles me so much as *what I am.* All my efforts to improve

myself have failed; and though I thought I was converted, I find myself as bad as ever, and I am disgusted with myself." *You* are finding out what attaches to you as a child of Adam—what it is to belong to a race that will not do for God; and you are discovering something of what "sin in the flesh" is, and of the nature of that "carnal mind" which is "not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." (Rom. viii. 7.) For you I will read Romans viii. 3—"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." The thing which is now through grace so trying and hateful to you is not less hateful to God; but it has received its full judgment at the cross. Sin in the flesh has received its just desert at the hand of God—it has been "condemned." *Sin*, as well as *sins*—the root as well as the fruit—was brought before God at the cross, and there dealt with in unmitigated judgment. God has been as fully glorified about what *you are* as He has about what you *have done*. What a relief and joy to know this.

Now, if you look at 2 Chronicles vii. 7 you will notice that three things are mentioned there—(1) The burnt offerings; (2) the meat offerings; (3) the fat of the peace offerings. That is, everything is looked at from God's side. If we begin by learning the perfection of the work of Christ, in bearing our sins and putting away sin, we must not stop there, or limit our apprehension of that wondrous work to the side of it which meets *our* need. It is an immeasurable loss to us if we do not go on to learn what the work of the cross has been for God. In connection with the burnt

offering we may read Ephesians v. 2—"Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." The Lord Jesus came here to take up the whole question of sin, and the glory of God in respect of sin. Think of that scene of judgment, when all that God was, and must be against sin, came out and was expressed as it never can be expressed again throughout eternity. All that sin was in the presence of the holiness, majesty, and glory of God came out there. But as you think of that scene of darkness and judgment and death, in which the glory of God was maintained and vindicated to its utmost bound as to all that sin was before Him, remember that there was something greater at that cross than the darkness and the judgment and the death—something greater than the sin in respect of which God was so eternally glorified there. May God give each of our hearts a deep, adoring apprehension of that greater thing. I refer to the infinitely perfect affections of the heart of that blessed One—the obedience and love in which He was there—the devotedness of the holy Victim which made every part of that unspeakable self-sacrifice *a sweet-smelling savour to God.* Have those words—almost His last ones—never thrilled your heart? "That the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence." (John xiv. 31.) "Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life." (John x. 17.) Never again can the Son so express His love to the Father as it was expressed at the cross when He gave Himself to maintain the divine glory in respect of sin. Well may He speak of that

death as a motive for the Father's love to Him, for never were His perfections of obedience and love so wondrously displayed before.

Then there was the meat offering. It was due to God that in the very place where man had so dishonoured Him there should be found a Man to honour Him in unfaltering devotedness to His will. I believe the meat offering sets forth the Lord Jesus in His personal devotedness to God; as Philippians ii. expresses it, "obedient unto death." Nothing could move Him from the path which, "uncheered by earthly smiles, led only to the cross." His devotedness was tested in every way—in private life, in public service, and in that hour of darkness preceding and including the cross. There was at last One found in all the circumstances of man who would take the very lowest place in obedience to God's will, and who would die rather than swerve from the path of devotedness to God. He "resisted unto blood, striving against sin." He would carry out the will of God at all cost to Himself.

"And the fat." It is blessed to know that there are depths and riches of personal excellence in Christ beyond all that we know or can know. "All the fat is the Lord's." (Lev. iii. 16.) All the personal excellence of that blessed One, as only God can know and estimate it, has come out at the cross to the eternal satisfaction and gratification of the heart of God. So that whether as to the glory of God in respect of sin, or as to personal devotedness in Man, or as to the excellence of the holy One who was thus devoted, CHRIST fills with absolute perfection everything which the altar demanded. So that the place of sin and judgment

and death is the very place above all others in the universe where perfection has been displayed.

In connection with this notice the words—so richly significant—"the brazen altar which Solomon had made was not able to receive the burnt offerings, and the meat offerings, and the fat." I think this serves to show how every type and figure fails to express the greatness of Christ and the cross. The perfections of that Person and work are infinite. There can be no measurement of the glory of God, of the devotedness of the Sufferer, or of His personal excellence. May God enlarge our hearts to apprehend all this a little more fully.

THE THRONE.

If Christ filled the oracle and the altar He also fills the throne, and this brings us to His present place on high. The thought connected with the throne is administration. "Blessed be Jehovah thy God, which delighted in thee to set thee on His throne, to be king for Jehovah thy God: because thy God loved Israel, to establish them for ever, therefore made He thee king over them, to do judgment and justice." (2 Chron. ix. 8.) Solomon was set on Jehovah's throne to administer everything for God to the people. Christ, having filled the oracle and the altar, now fills the throne; He is exalted to administer everything for God. No other but the One who is the perfect Object of satisfaction and delight to the heart of God could fitly administer all the grace and blessing of that heart to men. What an exalted view, and what a divine measure, does this give of the greatness of Christian blessings! "Because thy God loved Israel, to establish them for ever, therefore made He thee king over them."

The greatness of God's love, and of His gracious purposes, is expressed in the greatness and glory of the Person who administers it all to us from God. There is not a single Christian blessing which is not administered now by and through Christ in glory. All the blessings of divine grace are administered by and through an enthroned and glorified Saviour. The remission of sins (Acts ii. 36-38), salvation (Acts iv. 11, 12), justification (Acts xiii. 38, 39), peace with God (Rom. v. 1), access into favour (Rom. v. 2), reconciliation, and joy in God (Rom. v. 11), are all administered to us through a risen and glorified Saviour. The ministration of righteousness is from Him (2 Cor. iii.), and in His face shines the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. (2 Cor. iv. 6.) We get no right estimate of the character and greatness of our blessings until we see them in living connection with Christ in glory.

How much we may learn from this Gentile Queen who "came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon." She heard of the fame of the one who was set on Jehovah's throne to administer everything for God to the objects of His love, and nothing would satisfy her heart but coming to that glorious person, that she might see in his presence the reality of that greatness of which she had heard in her own land. My brethren, is there no such journey for *our* hearts to take to-day? Indeed there is. For the satisfaction of the heart it is not enough to hear the report; the soul must reach the company of the One of whom it has heard. It is a supremely blessed moment when the heart is so attracted by the fame and the glory of the true Solomon that

it turns away from man and from present things to travel outside the whole sphere of sight and sense into the company of the glorious Person who fills the throne. In His company—in conscious nearness to Himself—there is not, there could not be, an unsatisfied desire in the heart. The reality was beyond the report, and beyond all the greatest expectation of the Queen's heart. Not only was all her need met—all her enigmas solved—but she found herself in the circle of Solomon's greatness and glory; and every detail in that circle expressed his wisdom, and the perfections and grace of Jehovah, on whose throne he was set. What a journey for the heart! To leave our own land—the place of need, and unrest, and unsatisfied longing, where self is the great centre and object, and to come to One who has a perfect answer for every question of the heart, and who brings us into His own circle, and fills our hearts with His own greatness and glory. May every one of our hearts be so attracted to Himself that we may be prepared to leave in spirit everything that is here to reach His presence and have His company.

The great object which God has in view is to attach our affections to Christ; and I trust He may use the ministry of His Word to-night to this end, so that the blessed Person of Christ, who has filled the oracle and the altar, and who now fills the throne, may truly fill each one of our hearts. Amen.

MOUNT ZION.

HEB. xii. 18–24.

THERE is a grandeur and majesty about this paragraph which at once arrests attention, and it is well that we should have some idea of the great things which are here put in contrast to all that savours of Sinai and law. There has been nothing which Satan has pursued with such diligence, or attained with such success, as to get Christians back to the law. He does not deny point blank that there is blessing to be had, but he nullifies it all by making it dependent upon something in ourselves. We get it plainly stated in Acts xv. by the men which came down from Judæa, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." "Ye must be circumcised and keep the law." And the same thing has gone on ever since in one form or another.

Now, so long as one thinks that his blessing depends in any way, or in any degree, upon himself, he is under the shadow of Sinai, and naturally we all gravitate in that direction. Many truly converted persons are more occupied with themselves, and in trying to improve their own condition, than in seeking to learn THE GRACE OF GOD. The result is, that where there is a shallow work of God in the soul they get lifted

up with pride and conceit, and perhaps deceive themselves so far as to think there is no sin in them. On the other hand, if souls are upright and sincere they get into terrible distress, and experience what it is to have to do with Sinai—blackness, darkness, and tempest, so that a holy man like Moses could only "exceedingly fear and quake." Thank God! we are not come to that mountain, but to another—even to "Mount Zion."

It is most interesting to see the place that Zion has in the Old Testament, and in connection with this I may say that the two thousand years from Abraham to Christ may be divided into four periods. 1. From the time when the promises were given unconditionally to Abraham and to his seed to the giving of the law at Sinai. 2. From the law to the setting up of Zion as the divine centre on earth. 3. From Zion to the captivity. 4. From the captivity to Christ. I do not think you will find that the failure of the people is *prominent* in the first period; it is rather God's patient grace and unwearied care that shine forth in every way.

But at Sinai an altogether different principle came in. The people undertook to keep the law, and put themselves under it as a condition of blessing. God warned them, in the very terribleness of the majesty described here (Heb. xii. 18, 19), that the consequences to them—being what they were—must be dreadful. Nevertheless, they proudly assumed their self-imposed burden, and henceforward all was failure. The people failed in every point where failure was possible—the prophet failed, the priest failed, the judges failed, the king failed; and it became manifest that from the sole

of the foot even unto the head there was no soundness in Israel, and Israel was but a chosen sample of the race of Adam.

What was to be done? The shadows of Sinai could only fill the earth with darkness and death. God must have another centre to act from if there was to be any display of His grace, or any blessing for man, and He chose Mount Zion to be that centre. He "chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion, which He loved." (Psalm lxxviii. 68.) But you will notice that *the chosen place* is connected with *the chosen man*—"He chose David also His servant." (*v.* 70.) The necessity for this comes out in the history of Zion, which seems to have been the very centre and key of the enemy's power. It was not taken by Joshua, by the judges, or by Saul. It was an impregnable fortress held by the blind and lame, for the Jebusites taunted David, "saying, Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither: thinking, David cannot come in hither. Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion: the same is the city of David." (2 Sam. v. 6, 7.)

May we not learn something from this? Does it not suggest that man's condition as under the power of sin is the strength of Satan's stronghold, and the great obstacle in the way of God's thoughts of grace and blessing? But in due time God laid help upon One who was mighty—One who was able to "take away the blind and the lame." God has brought forward the Man of His choice, and the power of the enemy has been destroyed by the victorious hand of the true David. In the death of Christ the blind and the lame have been taken away, sin in the flesh

has been condemned, and the end of all flesh has come before God. The whole state of imperfection, in which man was so terribly to God's dishonour, has been righteously removed from before Him in the death of Christ. And now grace can "reign through righteousness." God can act in unmingled grace; He can set aside the covenant of Sinai, and make a new covenant with His people, according to which He will forgive and forget their sins and iniquities, and will put His laws into their hearts and write them in their minds. (Heb. viii. 10–12; x. 16, 17.) That is, in the New Covenant everything will be the outcome of Grace, and will be the evidence of *what God can be for His people.* In the "age to come" Israel will derive everything from God on those principles of Grace, of which in the Old Testament Zion is the familiar and appropriate symbol. But *we* anticipate that day; our blessings and relationships with God are altogether on the ground of His Grace. We are "come to Mount Zion."

Zion was secured by the conquest of the Lord's Anointed. GRACE could never have had its sovereign way in blessing but for the victorious work of Calvary. It is there that sins were put away, sin was judged, principalities and powers were spoiled, the devil annulled, and God glorified. What a victory! Everything that constituted the enemy's power was met and overcome at Calvary by the true David, and on the ground of His victory God has committed to Him the administration of absolute and sovereign grace.

Well might the Holy Ghost call upon the saints to "walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks,

consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following." (Psalm xlviii. 12, 13.) If our hearts would be established with grace we must, in a spiritual sense, "walk about Zion." We must mark the bulwarks, tell the towers, and consider the palaces of the city of grace.

1. "Her bulwarks." "We have a strong city; *salvation* will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." (Isaiah xxvi. 1.) No power of evil can overthrow those bulwarks. God's wisdom, grace, and power are all pledged to carry out the purposes of His love, and those purposes are bound up with the eternal deliverance and security of His saints. The enemy has not to reckon with us, but *with God*. It is "*God* who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." (2 Tim. i. 9.) And "by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." (Eph. ii. 8, 9.)

2. "The towers thereof." A tower is a place of refuge and strength. "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." (Prov. xviii. 10.) And in Psalm xx. we read, "The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee; send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion." (*vv.* 1, 2.) The only source of strength is the grace of God. A believer who has a feeble sense of grace is spiritually weak.

> "We need throughout the walk of faith
> The same free grace that saves."

It is a great thing to know that we can always count upon the perfect grace of God. This is a true source of stability and power. We are exhorted to "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb. iv. 16.) A sense that God is supreme in grace is a strong tower for the soul. "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God." (Psalm xx. 7.) Connect this with the second verse, and you will see that it is linked in the psalmist's mind with Zion. Chariots are human contrivances, and horses are a figure of natural strength, and both are vain things for safety, but "the name of the LORD is a strong tower." It is self-sufficiency that hinders us from proving what a refuge and strength we have in the "God of all grace."

3. "Her palaces." "God is known in her palaces for a refuge." (Psalm xlviii. 3.) There is nothing so blessed as *to know God*, and He has made Himself known *in grace*. Of old it could be said, "In Judah *is God known* . . . His dwelling-place in Zion" (Psalm lxxvi. 1, 2); but it is in the full glory of heavenly grace that we know Him now. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." (Eph. i. 3.) To the praise of the glory of His grace He has made us accepted in the Beloved; and in the ages to come He will show the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. Blessed be God! His grace has come to us, and we have come to it. "Ye are come unto Mount Zion." "There the LORD commanded the blessing, even life

for evermore." (Psalm cxxxiii. 3.) Are you dwelling in the prisons of Sinai, or in the palaces of Zion?

"And unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." A city is man's ideal, and has been from the earliest times. Cain "builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch." (Gen. iv. 17.) "And they said, Go to, let us build us a city." (Gen. xi. 4.) A city represents established government, and it stands connected with fallen man's desire to take possession of the earth. But man has no right to the earth, and therefore man's city must come down. It is a mark of faith in all the ages that the saints have not been satisfied with man's city. Every true saint on earth has looked for God's government to be set up here. Abraham "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (Heb. xi. 10.) This expectancy of the saints finds expression in the prayer, "Thy kingdom come."

Alas! many believers nowadays seem to be occupied with the wrong city. Politics have to do with man's city. It is all a conflict as to who can get the upper hand in the absence of the rightful King. I admit that Parliament may make laws which are a benefit to men; but the whole system of things is very shortly to be swept away. The whole order of things which has been set up by man will be overturned. God is going to have everything brought under the sway of His city. A believer who takes part in politics is like a man building a magnificent cathedral in a place where a tremendous earthquake will shortly overturn every stone. I do not suppose a great sculptor would lavish all the resources of his art on

a snow man. He would prefer to work in marble, that his labours might have permanent value. It is sad to see Christians wasting their lives on politics. It shows they have not come in the faith of their souls to "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem."

"And to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly." What immense things Christianity brings us into. People sometimes say that we Christians are not broad enough in our views—we are too narrow-minded. I venture to say that it is the man of the world who is narrow-minded. The Christian is the broad man. His circle includes the whole universe of God; he sees it all brought in to taste the blessing of the work of Christ. God is going to set the whole universe—every principality and power and intelligence—in everlasting suitability to Himself by the work of Christ. He will bring the universe to find its moral centre in Calvary. Things in earth and things in heaven are all to be put in eternal suitability to God by Christ. There will never be another break-down in the universe, for everything will be secured by grace, and on the ground of redemption. The "innumerable company of angels, the general assembly," will all know something of the grace of God as that by which Christ has tasted death for everything. I may add, to prevent misunderstanding, that infernal beings, and those who are cast with them into the lake of fire, will be eternally outside the range of reconciliation. They will have to bow at the name of Jesus; but they will not be reconciled. (Compare Phil. ii. 10, 11 with Col. i. 20.)

"And church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven." The Christian is made to know the peculiar

place of the church in the counsels of God. And here it is looked at, according to the teaching of this epistle, as a company with a heavenly calling and a heavenly inheritance. We may trace the thought, typically, in the history of the tribe of Levi. That tribe was taken as representing the firstborn sons of Israel, and they got no inheritance in the land of Canaan. Jehovah was their inheritance. (Deut. xviii. 1, 2.) A man is registered where he has his possessions. The church of the firstborn belongs to heaven, and has its possessions there. Our names are "written in heaven." Our politics and our possessions are there. I take no interest in your politics here; I am a stranger passing through. This is the Christian's place on earth; he is a stranger passing through on his way to his own country where he has his inheritance.

You may say that some Christians have a large portion of worldly goods. Yes; but we are only stewards of what we have here—it does not belong to us. We hold it in trust, and are responsible for the way we use it to the One who has entrusted us with it. Our *possessions* are all in heaven. "An inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, reserved in heaven." (1 Peter i. 4.) And the Lord has bid us rejoice, not in having great gifts and powers here, but in the fact that our names are written in heaven. (Luke x. 20.) When God keeps us in sight of our heavenly possessions we do not covet things here; our portion is so much better than anything that is "under the sun."

"And to God the Judge of all." God has revealed Himself in Christianity as a *Saviour-God* and as *the Father*, but He does not cease to be "the Judge of all." In Christianity God maintains all that is due to

Himself as Sovereign Ruler of the universe, at the same time that He makes Himself known in the glories of grace. It has been a very successful wile of Satan to set one part of the revelation against another, saying, "God is love, and therefore there can be no eternal judgment; He is merciful, so there is no need to be converted, or to be washed in the blood of the Lamb." It is eternally true that God is "the Judge of all."

"And to the spirits of just men made perfect." The Old Testament saints did not arrive at perfection while in this world. Redemption was not accomplished, and the full revelation of God was not disclosed. It was the will of God that they without us should not be made perfect. (Heb. xi. 40.) They will reach perfection along with us in resurrection. It must have been a great thing for the Hebrew believers to be thus assured of the triumphant issue of the path of faith for all those who had trodden it in Old Testament times.

"And to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant." We have not exactly come to the new covenant yet, but we have come to Him who is the Mediator of it. All will be made good to Israel, and to those brought into millennial blessing in the age to come, through the mediatorship of Jesus.

"And to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." This is the basis of everything—whether we think of heavenly grace, or earthly blessings such as will be known in the age to come, all have their foundation in THE BLOOD.

"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." The things of which I have spoken constitute the "kingdom

which cannot be moved." Everything in the sphere of sight is moveable, and will be shaken to pieces ere long; but the kingdom of faith cannot be moved. What is invisible to sight is of no account in this world. It has been the ruin of the church that men would have something that could be seen—fine buildings, a human priesthood, a visible head, etc. etc. The things which constitute the kingdom of faith *cannot be seen*. CHRIST reigns to-day in the kingdom of *truth*. He said, "My kingdom is not of this world. . . . For this cause come I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice." (John xviii. 36, 37.) He reigns in an invisible kingdom; He reigns by the truth in the hearts of His people. *We* reign, if I may so say, in the kingdom of *faith*, and it is a "kingdom which cannot be moved"—a kingdom which lies altogether outside the sphere of sight. Not one of the things to which we have come can be seen. They will be seen in the age to come; but in faith we are come to them now. "Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

THE BRAZEN SERPENT AND THE SPRINGING WELL.

NUMBERS xxi. 4–11, 16–18.

THE Scripture we have read to-night refers to what happened very near the end of the wilderness journey. Before that journey began the people had to learn, in type, the solemn reality of the judgment of God on sin, and they found in the blood of the lamb that which furnished them with perfect shelter. We all had to begin there. We found ourselves under God's judgment, but we discovered that He had provided a Lamb for us. The death of Christ has fully and eternally glorified God as to sin, and its judgment is exhausted for all those who have faith in God.

Then at the Red Sea, in presence of all the power of the oppressor, God showed His salvation to His people, and brought them into a position of complete triumph. But for this their eyes had to be turned entirely to God. The passage of the sea was a total impossibility to human power, but *God* made them walk on dry ground through the midst of the sea, and stood between them and all the power of the oppressor until they were brought through on to the other side, and then He rolled the waters of judgment over their foes.

Then they could sing, "The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation."

The salvation of God puts us in a place where the oppressor can never reach us, because it puts us in the place and acceptance of Christ Risen. When you see that, every question as to divine righteousness is settled, and you enter into perfect peace with God. The oppressor may say, "You are this or that," or "You have done such and such things," and you can admit it. Yea, you are convinced that if the best five minutes of your life was selected, and your righteousness with God made to depend on it, the lake of fire would be your eternal abode. But the believer's righteousness before God is measured by Christ Risen; he is set in all the acceptance of the Beloved. There is not a single spot upon him and never will be. God will not at all reckon sin to the believer, but does reckon righteousness to him. This is learned before the wilderness is entered upon.

It has often been said that the wilderness formed no part of God's purpose. His *purpose* was to give His people the land of Canaan. But in the *ways* of God they had to go through the wilderness, and this for an important reason, which we learn from Deut. viii. 2: "And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or no." God's object in so ordering His ways that the people were forty years in the wilderness was that they might know themselves. When the question of divine righteousness is settled for the believer the exercises which follow are all,

more or less, connected with holiness. It is after the believer is entirely delivered from fear of the *consequences* of sin that he is most deeply and truly exercised about holiness. There are people who tell us that if souls are made sure of their eternal salvation, and that they are set in everlasting righteousness before God, it will make them careless about sin. This argument is based upon ignorance of the immense reality of the fact that the believer is *born again*. A converted person hates sin *for its own sake*. An unconverted man may wish to be good for three reasons—(1) because sin brings him into trouble; (2) because it lowers him; and (3) because he is afraid of its consequences. He does not abhor sin because it is an unholy and defiling thing. The one born again hates sin for its own sake.

The forty years of wilderness experience was to teach the people what they were—what was in their hearts. And *we* have to go through this experience; there is no escaping it. I think there are three principal ways in which we learn what self is.

1. By some actual fall or sin. When you commit a sin, is it not a discovery to you of *what you are?* Peter is an example of this. He did not know what was in his heart. He loved the Lord, but he was self-confident, and wished to have credit for his love. The Lord had to teach him what was in his heart. But I believe the Lord in His faithful love never allows us to fall into open failure straight off. He warns us, and we go down step by step. Peter began by walking in the counsel of the ungodly. When the Lord spoke of His death Peter said, "Be it far from Thee," and the Lord had to say to him, "Thou

savourest not the things that be *of God*, but those that be of men." (Matt. xvi.) Next Peter stood in the way of sinners when he made himself one of the company who warmed themselves at the fire in the high priest's house. I wonder what sort of company it was—what sort of conversation was going on. Last of all he sat in the seat of the scornful, and denied the Lord. I think we can understand a little the anguish of his soul when the Lord turned and looked upon him, and he went out and wept bitterly. It was a sorrowful bit of wilderness experience to him, but he needed it to humble him, and to show him what was in his heart.

2. Another way in which we learn self is by the effect of the trying circumstances of the way. "The soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way." (Numbers xxi. 4.) God in His faithful love will not allow us to be deceived as to what we are, and He brings us into circumstances that make manifest the true character of the flesh. The flesh cannot bear to be cast upon God, and in the wilderness this is a necessity: there is no resource there but God. And, remember, the children of Israel were there in consequence of their sin and unbelief. Circumstances that we have brought upon ourselves by our own sin and folly are more trying than anything else. The flesh fumes and frets and chafes under them. They "spake against God and against Moses." Think of their history for a moment! They had been under the blood, and had been brought through the Red Sea; the hand and heart of God had cared for them at every step of the wilderness; His cloud had overshadowed them, and their raiment had not waxed old for forty years;

yet after all this they "spake against God." I will say more about this directly, but for a moment I will speak of the third way in which we learn what the flesh is.

3. Psalm xlii. 1–6. This is a bit of wilderness experience. We have here a soul finding out that all the springs of joy have failed, and that it is in a thirsty condition. It is a solemn moment when one who has been going on for years with a flourishing profession wakes up to the fact that his heart is entirely unsatisfied. I am supposing one who knows redemption. The man in Psalm xlii. could look back and remember wonderful times. "I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday." (*v.* 4.) I believe we have very little idea how natural feelings may be mixed up with what we think is our spiritual joy. Many go on happily because their surroundings are happy, and they have no opposition to speak of—perhaps in a Christian family, or in happy Christian society. They are carried along by the current of things around them.

But everything that *outwardly* contributes to your joy will sooner or later fail you. You may think this is a discouraging statement, but my object in making it is to turn your heart to what can never fail. God loves us too well to allow us to rest in anything short of Himself—not even Christian fellowship, or what people call "the means of grace." He wants to be so known by us that He becomes the deep eternal spring of satisfaction for our hearts. "Therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar." (*v.* 6.) This man is

in the wilderness. Jordan, the place of death; Hermon, the rugged place; Mizar, the little hill, where you are brought down to nothingness, and made to realize the emptiness of everything here.

To return to Numbers xxi. We find the people at the end of the wilderness speaking against God. This is the true character of the flesh—the carnal mind is enmity against God. In Romans viii. we may read it in black and white, but to find it true in ourselves is a terribly bitter experience. "There is no bread, neither is there any water, and our soul loatheth this light bread." God was sending them angel's food, and they loathed it. I know by experience that the very thought of the perfection of heavenly grace in which Christ went through the wilderness may vex and irritate one because it condemns one so thoroughly. The more you think of it, the more you are irritated by the contrast between Him and yourself. Then comes out positive enmity against God, and this is the root of what the flesh is. The questions rise in the heart, "Why does not God make it easier for me to live to Him? Why does He not give me more grace? Why does He not put me in different circumstances?" This is really casting the blame on God; it is speaking against God. That is what the flesh is; it would cast the blame of all its own wickedness and vileness upon God. That is the outcome and evidence of enmity against God; it is the poison of the serpent. It is a sad thing to think of, but man in the flesh has become akin to Satan. When positive enmity came out the Lord said, "Ye are of your father the devil." Have you found out that as in the flesh you are of that order? What can be done

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with the flesh if that is its nature? and after forty years' experience of grace and mercy too? *Death* must come in on man in the flesh. The Lord sent serpents among the people, and much people died. Death comes in as the judgment of God on the murmurer, but at the same time grace provides a way of life and deliverance.

Moses was commanded to make a fiery serpent and set it upon a pole, and if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass he lived. The Son of Man has been lifted up—God has sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin—that in His death sin-in-the-flesh might receive its just condemnation. As a child of Adam I passed out of God's sight when Christ died. God has righteously done with man in the flesh; the history of that man has been judicially terminated in the cross. And the fact that he is gone out of God's sight is *our title* to be free from him, and to be so in the power of life *in Christ* that we are practically free from what constitutes the life of our "old man." The removal of sin-in-the-flesh in righteous condemnation is not everything. It is not enough for God to remove what is bad; He must also bring in what is good; and life and incorruptibility are now brought to light in a risen Christ, and *He is the life of* the believer.

The Son of Man was lifted up "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John iii. 16.) He died in order to have a righteous title to give us eternal life. He died that He might introduce us to the joys of a life that is in Himself—the Son. Wonderful things were on His heart for His own, things of which He could not even

speak to them, as He said, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." (John xvi. 12.) What He could not say to *them* He could say to *the Father* in the marvellous words of John xvii., where we read, "Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee; as Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him. And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." He takes His place here as the last Adam—the Head of the new race—and He asks to be glorified that He may glorify the Father. How will He do it? By giving eternal life to as many as the Father has given Him. The cross is *His title* to take us over into that life, and it is *our title* to pass over.

A picture of our introduction into that new life can be found in John xx.: "He breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Here we see the Head of the new creation—alive out of death—associating His own with Himself in life. What a blessed thing to be able to look at Him beyond judgment, law, sin, and death, in unbroken and undistracted joy with the Father—in the cloudless peace of resurrection—and to know that He is our life!

On our side we get into it by eating His flesh and drinking His blood according to John vi. 53. I need hardly say that is not eating the Lord's supper; it is our souls feeding upon Christ as the One who has laid down His life to entitle us to be free from our old life as children of Adam. *He* could only free us by death; and we are only free experimentally as we appropriate to ourselves the death that frees us.

In this way the soul begins a new day in its history. "They pitched . . . toward the sunrising." (Numbers xxi. 11.) It was the dawn of a new day to them. Up to this point they were travelling, I believe, with their backs upon Canaan—due south, or nearly so. To pitch toward the sunrising was to turn eastwards. That is, they were just on the turn towards Canaan—the land of promise and purpose. Have you come to the turn? That new day of the soul's history never has a sunset. Its dawn is known now in grace and by the Spirit, and it brightens into the perfect day of glory. Have you had a taste of what it is to participate in the life of the last Adam?—to pass over into the sunshine of favour in which Christ associates His own with Himself before His Father and His God?

Then, immediately afterwards, we find the springing well. "The Lord spake unto Moses, Gather the people together, and I will give them water. Then Israel sang this song, Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it." (Numbers xxi. 16, 17.)

The third chapter of John gives us the antitype of the brazen serpent, and the fourth chapter the antitype of the springing well. The Lord said to the woman at Sychar's well, "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (John iv. 14.) The new life is a life in the power of the Spirit, and that makes it an abundant life—a life of liberty and power. I am not speaking of power for activity in service or the like, but of the inward spring and power of divine affections that flow in fulness and freedom Godward and heavenward. I get the best idea of what the springing well is from

these words in John xx.: "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God." The springing well is the *consciousness*, in living power, of this marvellous relationship in which we are set as associated in life with Christ risen.

If your heart and mine were maintained in the conscious joy and power of this wondrous life, and of the relationships and associations which are *natural to it*, we should be indeed in what has been well called "a region of satisfied desire."

You get the same thing in Rom. viii, only there it is more the negative side—the down line. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ hath made me free from the law of sin and death." (*v.* 2.) If the up line is kept clear the down line will be all right. That is, if our affections are in proper play according to John iv. we shall be practically free from the law of sin and death, as in Rom. viii. 2.

Then, observe, the three things go on together—the *digging*, the *singing*, and the *springing*. The princes and the nobles digged the well. If you want to be a prince or a noble in the Lord's host you must be a well-digger. They were diligently removing with purpose of heart that which would have hindered the well from springing up. These are the true nobility to-day—the saints who are so set in the purpose of their hearts for the things of the Spirit that they will not allow *the things of earth* to obstruct the flow of the living water. They are set for wisdom, and have entered into the spirit of such words as "Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest

her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." (Prov. ii. 2–5, and Prov. iv. 5–9.)

Then we need to be *singing* to the well, and, as the margin reads, *answering* to it. If the affections and joys of our hearts are in the current of the Spirit of God we shall, so to speak, encourage Him in His blessed service by the response of our hearts. Where this is lacking the Spirit is grieved, though there may be no sin on the conscience. May God bless His own Word to us all!

STABLISHED IN CHRIST.

IT is God's great object to stablish us in Christ. (2 Cor. i. 21.) We are not really in line with God's purpose, and we have not the key to Scripture or our own experiences, until we know what it is to be stablished in Christ. I should like briefly to bring before you what I believe to be conveyed in that expression.

We may learn many of the thoughts of God from the Old Testament. All God's promises express His purposes, and His purposes express what He is in Himself. Suppose a man knew so much of God as the Old Testament would teach him, and in view of that looked into the world, what would he see? That not one thought of God had been established in man. The more holy a man was, and the more he understood what was expressed of God's thoughts by the law and the prophets, the more he would have a despairing sense that all God's thoughts had failed to be established in man, least of all in himself.

Then take the New Testament. More light has come—the full light has come. All God's thoughts have come out. I cannot imagine anything more calculated to fill an honest conscience with despair than the New Testament, *if you leave Christ out.* You may wonder why I state it thus, but, indeed,

this is just what men do with the New Testament. They make Christ a Law-giver greater than Moses, and the New Testament a book which gives us more of the mind of God than the Old; and all the precepts of Christ and the exhortations of the epistles are taught as a superior kind of law. All this is taken up in self-sufficiency by man, as if he could carry it out; or, on the other hand, where there is honesty of conscience the soul is filled with misery and despair. Now, this is leaving Christ out. We have to learn that God has established every thought of His heart in Christ.

Take everything that the law required. It has all been established in Christ. What a relief to be able to turn to one Person by whom the whole great claim of God upon man in flesh has been fully rendered. It was due to God that there should be a Man in flesh and under law able to fill up the whole compass of man's responsibility with perfection. How differently we should read the law, and everything in the Old Testament which expresses the claim of God upon man, if we started with the knowledge that God has secured it all for Himself in Christ. In this way the law would set before us the perfection of Christ.

But in this scripture (2 Cor. i.) it is not *law* that is before us, but *promises*. Promises are the announcement of what God would effect for His own pleasure in carrying out His purposes. But how could God's purposes for man be carried out in the face of man's complete break-down, and the apparent triumph of sin and death in the world? Our total ruin as under sin and death could not be ignored. All the questions raised by the fall and sin must be righteously

settled. God must be glorified as to sin and death, and by the complete removal from before Him of man in the flesh—the corrupt and irretrievable man in whom not one of God's thoughts could ever be established. This is the work of the cross. God has been glorified about sin by One who has borne its full judgment, and the man in whom sin was is ended before God in the death of Christ.

At the cross we see the complete and righteous removal in judgment of all that has been offensive to God in man; but that is not enough. God has positive thoughts of favour and blessing for man. It would be no adequate satisfaction for God to remove the bad. He must also establish the good—establish what is according to His own thoughts and purposes. Christ has been "raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father" (Rom. vi. 4), and in Him man is now seen according to the purpose and satisfaction of the heart of God. He is beyond sin, death, and judgment, in everlasting righteousness and acceptance. *Man*, in the person of Christ, is now the expression of God's triumph over sin and death, and He is also the divinely-suited Object of God's affections. God has secured everything that He could wish for in man. There is not a single thing that would give satisfaction or pleasure to God in man that He has not secured for Himself in Christ. How differently the Bible reads when you start with this thought. Indeed, without it you read your Bible upside down.

But there is something else which it is of the deepest importance for our hearts to apprehend. God has established all His own thoughts and purposes in Christ, and has done it for His own glory; but observe

that it is "unto the glory of God *by us*." (2 Cor. i. 20.) *We* are linked up with all that God has established in Christ. Paul could speak of himself and Timothy and the Corinthians as having been stablished in Christ by God. The thought conveyed is that of being firmly attached to Christ, and for this the work of God in our souls is necessary. Nothing will satisfy God but that we should be stablished in what He has established in Christ—that it should be so in our souls as to be "to the glory of God *by us*." He has effected His purposes in Christ, and now His whole work in our souls is to the end that we should be stablished in — firmly attached to—what He has effected.

I can only briefly touch upon three steps in soul-experience by which this is reached. First, we learn what sin is before God by knowing the One who alone could bear its judgment, and what it cost Him to bear it. This is the Passover. We learn that the judgment due to us has been borne by Another. Then, in the next place, we learn what it is to be justified, which answers to the passage of the Red Sea. We learn that God will not impute sin to us, but that He does impute righteousness—righteousness measured and expressed by Christ risen.

Then the third great step brings us to what is typified by the brazen serpent. Many a justified man might describe his experience in words like these—"I fully recognize, and rejoice in the fact, that I am righteous before God according to Christ risen; and this being so, nothing but Christ can be my standard of holiness or rule of life. If I could only walk up to it I think I should be a perfectly happy man. But it is one failure after another; and when I think I have

got on a bit, something turns up, and I find myself as bad as ever, and the thought of this damps all my spiritual joy." In this stage of spiritual experience there are continual discoveries of *self* which make self more and more repulsive, and there is also the presentation of Christ again and again in which the soul finds increasing delight. It is a kind of John the Baptist experience—"He must increase, but I must decrease." Christ is increasing, and self decreasing, in the estimation of the believer's heart.

This repulsion and attraction go on together until the soul accepts with God the reality of the incorrigible badness of the flesh. Then comes a burst of glorious light. We see that the death of Christ severs us from our old self, and that Christ is our life. We are free by the cross from the man who is so repugnant to us, and we discover with untold delight that the One who has so attracted our hearts is our life. "Christ liveth in me." (Gal. ii. 20.) We are stablished in Christ. Christ is written in our hearts. And this in the power of the Spirit of God. The anointing (2 Cor. i. 21) is the power according to which we are stablished in Christ. It is not a theory or a doctrine grasped by the mind; it is a reality in the soul by the Spirit.

"Who hath also sealed us." God's mark is upon us. He could not recognize the flesh at all; but when the flesh is displaced by Christ in our hearts we become such as God can own.

"And given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." Though our affections are brought into line with God's purpose, we are not yet in a condition which answers to that purpose. We may have still to prove in a thousand ways the deceitfulness and true character of

the flesh. We still have "vile bodies"—bodies which are not conformed to the image of the Son of God, and which are not fully suited to the Spirit of God. We wait for new creation bodies, and for a condition in which will be expressed the eternal triumph of God, and His complete satisfaction in man—man made suited to His righteousness and His affections in glory. But in being stablished in Christ we have the earnest of all this in our hearts. We enter into the purpose of God, and rejoice in it all, and have the power of it in our souls by the Spirit, though not a single thing is yet changed as to our bodies or our surroundings. May we more fully know what it is to be stablished in Christ.

CHRISTIANITY.

"For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

PHILIPPIANS iii. 3.

WE have in this verse a complete summary of Christianity. In the old dispensation circumcision marked the people separated to God, and the Christian company to-day constitute the true circumcision. This company is marked by three things. (1) They worship by the Spirit of God; (2) they rejoice in Christ Jesus; and (3) they have no confidence in the flesh.

The apostle was apparently drawing his letter to a close. He comes to his "finally," and the summing up of everything is "Rejoice in the Lord." This is really the summing up of the will of God for us to-day. Nothing could be more precious and blessed. But you may depend upon it that the devil will do all he can to hinder such a result. So the apostle has, so to speak, to begin again, that he may warn us against the hindrances to our spiritual joy. They are three in number—(1) religious flesh; (2) the whole sphere of sight; and (3) the cares of the wilderness.

But before I go on to the hindrances I should like to speak a little in detail on verse 3. "We are the circumcision, which worship God by the Spirit."

John iv. instructs us as to what the Father is seeking. He is seeking worshippers. That is the great interest of the Father in this present hour. The salvation of souls is not the end. The end that God has in view in all the activity of His grace is to have worshippers. And it is only possible to worship now *by the Spirit of God.* Note the connection between John iv. 14 and 23. The measure of our worship is the measure in which the Spirit of God has had His way in forming and building up our souls, and in putting divine affections in our hearts. The only help to worship is that which helps our souls to be more in the current of the Spirit. Music is no help. In singing a hymn, if people are thinking of the musical part of it, they are hindered. Worship is the adoration of the soul that is in the complete satisfaction of the knowledge of the Father. If the heart is not satisfied there may be thanksgiving, but there will not be true worship. How could we be in this absolute satisfaction, except by the Spirit of God?

The second mark of the company separated to God is that they "rejoice in Christ Jesus." If I may venture to say so, God has taken an infinitude of pains to bring us to this point. Let me turn your thoughts for a moment to 1 Cor. i. 29–31: "That no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

The central theme of this chapter is the cross, and the first thing we learn at the cross is the thorough exposure of man in the flesh. Nothing more can ever

come out about us as in the flesh than has come out at the cross. Some of us have been a few years on the road, and we have learned something of what poor things we are as in the flesh. If we are left here a little longer we shall learn more. But however much experience we may have had, or may yet have, we could never find out what we are to the extent that the cross has exposed us. I admit that we have to learn by experience; but we are not left to experience, we have divine light. It is a great comfort to know that we have been thoroughly exposed. There is nothing to be discovered in me that has not already come to light. You ask, "Where?" I answer, "At the cross."

It has come out in a double way. When Christ was here all the perfection of the grace of God shone in Him. God showed all His character in that blessed Man. God was manifest in flesh. What a terrible thing to discover that when God thus comes near to me I hate Him and cast Him out! We are akin to the men that actually did it; we are of the same stock. Then, further, when the Lord Jesus was here, not only was there in Him the perfect expression of God, but also of man. Man at last had a perfect neighbour, and was thus tested as to his neighbour, as well as to God. He went about doing good in every way; but what was the end of it? The cross.

If we were really in the light of the cross we should never be surprised at the evil we found in our hearts. We should be humbled by it, but not surprised at it. All the evil that we can discover in our hearts can never equal the truth as it is exposed by the cross, and that is the true measure of what we are. We can

learn in divine light more than we could learn in a hundred years of experience. It is really a great thing to be in the light of this perfect exposure.

Then we see at the cross how completely God has judged the exposed man. If I admit that my character has been exposed there, I must be sure that as in the flesh I could only be dealt with in holy judgment. Nothing would do but the absolute removal in judgment of man in the flesh. Christ was found under that judgment, and in His death the end of all flesh came before God. The judgment of God upon us is complete—nothing can be added to it. The deepest repentance, the greatest self-abhorrence, add nothing to the completeness of the judgment that has been exhausted by the One who went into death for us in matchless, divine love. We have the knowledge of this now as divine light for our souls. Some people make experience everything, but divine light is a much greater thing than experience. I know that experience is often needed to prepare us to receive the light, but divine light gives us a *perfect* measure of things, and experience is always more or less *imperfect.*

Then at the cross the love of God is fully disclosed; it is the point where the love of God meets us. We see there that our condition has not been able to turn aside the thoughts of blessing which were in God's heart for us. We see there the boundless love of God overleaping all the barriers that our sin had put in its way. God has taken everything into account, and has so dealt with our sin, that He is free to lavish the infinite love of His heart upon us.

The sin is removed in judgment: the love remains

to triumph in its own great thoughts of blessing for us. And this brings us to 1 Cor. i. 30: "Of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." Here we see the completeness of the triumph of divine love. We are before God according to His own way of dealing with our condition. Hence Christ Jesus is made unto us first "wisdom." We learn in Him, and by His cross, God's wisdom to meet our condition. Then, as to "righteousness," Christ Jesus is out of death, and as Man is in unclouded favour with God, and He is made righteousness to us. Further, as to "sanctification" we have no true idea of it until we see what a wonderful place Christ has taken as risen and glorified —completely apart from the whole scene of sin and death. Finally, in "redemption" we see the greatness of God's power. He has come in and raised up Christ from among the dead, and set Him in a glorified body at His own right hand. Very soon we shall have bodies like His. "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." We find in Him our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, and it is all *of God*. As in the flesh *we* are nowhere and nothing. All that *we* were is cleared away in judgment at the cross, and Christ Jesus remains. We "rejoice in Christ Jesus." Divine light brings us into this experience never would.

In the light of all this we can have no confidence in the flesh. We can have no expectation of any good ever coming out of it. You may make a drunkard into a sober man; you may reform the ways of a liar;

and in this way a great deal can be done for man in the flesh. But the end of all this is to leave him further from God than he was before. You may say that this is a hard saying, but I think it is easy to see that the better man is in the flesh, the more likely he is to trust in the flesh. He has more reason to be proud of himself, and satisfied with himself, and he is less likely to receive the grace of God. "The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." (Matt. xxi. 31.)

In Philippians iii. fleshly religion is brought before us as a spiritual hindrance, and Paul was chosen to be the vessel of this truth because he had most reason to trust in the flesh. "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." What a record! All this was a gain to Saul. No doubt he had a great reputation. He had more to boast of in a fleshly way than any other man; but he says, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." None of us here have such a record of fleshly gain; but *a very little bit* of anything that we think is a credit to us may be a great hindrance to our spiritual progress and joy. A little bit of reputation among a small circle of Christians even may be a snare to us. If there is anything about us that makes other people think well of us

there is danger that it may become a source of satisfaction to us. If we are like Paul it will not become a source of satisfaction; we shall count it loss. But if otherwise, one of two things will happen. We shall either go off the line of true Christianity, or God will come in and put His finger on that which is gratifying to us, and blight it. Paul was a man whose heart was fully set for Christ, and everything which would have given distinction to Paul was judged in the light of affection for Christ. "Those I counted loss *for Christ*"; that referred to what he had in Judaism. But he says further, "I count *all things* but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." *Everything* that would have given him credit or reputation he day by day counted to be loss. One supreme commanding Object dominated his heart—"Christ Jesus *my Lord*." That is bridal affection—the only thing needed to put everything right in our souls. Ten thousand things that cause perplexity would be solved in a moment if this affection burned in our hearts. Where shall I go? What companions shall I choose? How shall I spend my time? What book shall I read? All these questions would be quickly answered if we were *counting* everything "but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

"For whom I have suffered the loss of all things." So far as I know this is the only place where he speaks of this. We may gather elsewhere that he was a man of some position, but here only does he mention the fact that for Christ he had suffered the loss of all things. Nor was he looking back as Lot's wife looked back to Sodom. No; he says, "I count them but

dung." You may depend upon it that when people have a long tale to tell you about what they have lost, given up, or suffered for Christ, there has not been much given up *for Christ.* The things you give up *for Christ* are rubbish to you, which you are glad to be rid of. You do not look back, as if you half regretted them, or as if you had done a great thing in giving them up. It is a satisfaction and relief to your heart that you are clear of them.

"That I may win Christ." It is to have Christ known in the heart for present gain and joy, so that everything else becomes worthless. The knowledge of Christ is the only gain worth pursuing. The question with us is, How much are we after Christ? Religious flesh is nothing to the heart that has really come under the attractive power of Christ. Such a heart would be glad to be nothing but an object of divine love. Each one of us is either a John or a Peter. Peter was a disciple who loved Jesus, John was a disciple whom Jesus loved. If I am a disciple whom Jesus loves, it makes *nothing* of me, and everything of *His love.* But too often we are more like Peter, and get self-confident, so that we have to be reduced to a point where we are glad to nestle down into the sweetness of being *nothing* but a disciple whom Jesus loves.

A second great hindrance to spiritual joy is the whole sphere of sight or "earthly things." "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God

is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself." A solemn danger which besets the saints is that they may be earthly-minded. The apostle speaks of three different classes of people—(1) "thus minded"; (2) "otherwise minded"; (3) "earthly-minded." The first class were all right; the second class had their faces in the right direction; but the third had their faces in the wrong direction, and were all wrong. If your face is in the right direction God will come in and help you. You may not be up to Paul, you may fall short of his amazing energy; but if your face is in the right direction God will help you. The solemn thing is when we get our faces turned in the wrong direction. Some were minding earthly things; I dare say the apostle was thinking of earthly religious things. To be on that line is to be on the way to hell; it is the way that leads to destruction. The apostle might well weep for them; they were enemies of the cross of Christ—enemies to that place of suffering and death in this world of which the cross was the symbol. If you get on to that line there will be no rejoicing in the Lord.

In chapter iv. another hindrance is considered—the cares of the wilderness journey; and the Holy Ghost says, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of

God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." It is an easy thing for the cares of the pathway to cloud the joy of the soul; but do not alter the words we have been reading, "Be careful for *nothing*." The apostle says, "I am not theorising, I am only telling you to do what you have seen me do." People say, "I wish I could keep the peace of God." It says, "the peace of God *shall keep your* hearts and minds."

1 Peter v. 7 says, "Casting all your care upon Him." Have you ever tried to do it? You say, "I thought I did cast it on Him, but I came away and found I had brought it away with me." Ah! you did not begin soon enough. What goes before that? "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you." It is only as you own the mighty hand of God in your trying circumstances, and as you humble yourself under it, that you can cast your care upon Him. What a wonderful solace to know that we can turn to God!

If it is a question of religious flesh, we judge it—have no confidence in it. If it is a question of earthly things, we turn from them, for "our conversation is in heaven." And if it is a question of the cares of the wilderness journey, we can turn to *God*, who says, "I will not simply listen to you, but I will make your care an object of consideration; and I will give you My own peace, to be a garrison in your heart and mind, so that all the questionings and reasonings of Satan and unbelief shall not be able to invade your repose."

If we are in the power of these three things nothing will interfere with our joy. We shall be able

to enter into what the apostle says, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." That is the will of God for us. Consider it well. The will of God for His people to-day is that they should "rejoice in the Lord." To this end He would remove all confidence in the flesh, all occupation with earthly things, and all care about our wilderness circumstances. May we better know what it is to "rejoice in the Lord."

THE ACTIVITY AND PURPOSE OF GRACE.

JOHN i.

I HAVE no thought of attempting to unfold all that is contained in this chapter, but I should like to bring before you some of the great truths which are here presented to us. The first thing I wish to speak of is

THE CONDITION OF THE WORLD,

and the way in which it has been exposed. In the opening verses of this chapter the condition of the world is completely disclosed in a few simple words. Everything has been brought to light. We do not need to try experiments to find out what the world is. Nothing can be added to the exposure of John i. 1–11.

Men can never by wisdom or philosophy get to the bottom of things, because they leave God out. We must bring God in to get true light—to get a right estimate of anything. And here we see that all the light of God has come into the world. The "TRUE LIGHT" has come. The mind and nature of God have been most perfectly expressed in the Word made flesh, and in the light of this revelation the world has been

exposed. "The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." The light shone for every man, but it shone upon stone-blind eyes. There was every testimony to the conscience of man. For privileged Israel there was the witness of John; the appointed herald went before Jehovah, and everybody in Israel whose conscience was not hardened recognised him as sent of God. But all was in vain. There is no capacity in man to take in divine light. People say they want more light, but the truth is that *all* the light has come and been refused. The world is a scene of moral darkness, in which there is no response to God. If you accept this, you will be assured that THE GRACE OF GOD is man's only hope.

THE ACTIVITY OF GRACE.

It is certain that the Son of God would never have come into the world merely to expose the darkness that was in it. He has done that by the way, but the great thought of God was to reveal Himself (*v.* 18), and to have a company capable of appreciating that revelation. The world does not appreciate God, it will not receive a ray of light from Him; but He means to have a company with capacity to appreciate Him. This is the great design of grace. How could we be supremely happy in God's presence if we did not know and appreciate Him?

"As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons [children] of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of

blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." There is no capacity in the natural man to receive light from God. There must be a company born "of God" to receive light from Him. When I was converted I thought I could convert everybody, but I soon found that people did not want light from God. There must be a new race—a people born of God. To Nicodemus it was said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John iii. 3.) It is "not of blood," that is, by natural descent; nor is it of "the will of the flesh," or "of the will of man" in any way. It is "of God" in the activity and sovereignty of His grace. There is nothing in man that would originate any movement towards God, but He has purposed to have a company for Himself, and He will accomplish His purpose in spite of all the opposition and darkness that is in man. Every converted person knows that unless the grace of God had wrought in him he would never have received Christ. Nay, we did our utmost to resist the grace which sought our blessing. But God wrought in us, our self-sufficiency broke down, and a great void was produced in our hearts—a thirst for the knowledge of God—and thus we were prepared to receive the light.

"As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on His name." It is thus that the work of God in souls is brought to light. As Christ is preached, and the light of God shines forth, there is a response in hearts where God has wrought. Thus the light of grace, presented in the gospel, makes manifest those in whom there is a work of the Spirit of God. And those who receive the light—who

receive Christ by believing on His name—have the right to take the place of CHILDREN OF GOD. That is, they are entitled to take the place of having a kindred nature with God. They appreciate His light, and believe on the name of Him in whom it has all come.

Now I should like to say a few words about

THE PRIVILEGES OF THE CHILDREN,

as they are brought before us in the next few verses of the chapter. In looking at them, we must remember that we are not in the marvellous position occupied by the apostles. We enter into these things through their writings. The apostles could say, "Our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ"; and as to our part in it, John says, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us." (1 John i. 3.)

"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." The Son of the Father could not be at home in this world, but there was a little company among whom He could tabernacle. His heart could have no links with the darkness of the world, but amongst those born "of God" He could make Himself known, and speak of what was in His heart. He could say to the Father, "I have manifested Thy name unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world: Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me; and they have kept Thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever Thou hast given Me are of Thee. For I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me; and they have received them, and have

known surely that I came out from Thee, and they have believed that Thou didst send Me." (John xvii. 6–8.) Is it not a priceless privilege to be of the company to whom the Son can thus make Himself and the Father known?

"We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." What a new world for their hearts! What a contrast to all the scene of oppression, self-seeking, and religious corruption around! Many have enough light to make them dissatisfied with things here, who do not appear to have tasted the immeasurable satisfaction of contemplating the glory of the Word made flesh. The world cannot satisfy. If you had all the opportunities of Solomon you would find in the end that the world was too little for your heart. But here is an Object in whom the heart may find its absorbing and abiding satisfaction. "We contemplated His glory."

"Full of grace and truth." In the Word made flesh our hearts find the perfect revelation of all that the Father is in the activity of His matchless grace, and of all that He is in the blessedness of His own being and nature. And all subsists through Jesus Christ. There is no more to come, or to be known. It is all out. "The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."

"Of His fulness have all we received, and grace upon grace." We may have taken in very little of it, but it is "*of His fulness*" that we have received, and every taste of it awakens the desire for more. It is not only "grace" to begin with when the heart makes its first acquaintance with that glorious Person,

but it is "grace upon grace" in deepening knowledge of Him.

"Yet sure if in Thy presence
My soul still constant were,
Mine eye would more familiar
Its brighter glories bear.
And thus Thy deep perfections
Much better should I know,
And with adoring fervour
In this Thy nature grow."

Then as we pass on through the chapter we learn how the gracious purposes and the glory of God have an eternal basis in righteousness, and have been

SECURED BY REDEMPTION.

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (*v.* 29.) Here was a Person capable of taking up the whole question of sin, and of bearing its judgment so as to glorify God fully about it. The purposes of God rest upon this secure foundation, and in virtue of an accomplished redemption not only can they all be carried out, but the Holy Ghost can be given to bring the light and joy of those purposes into the hearts of the children of God. "He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." It is only in the power and unction of the Holy Ghost that we can enter into the wondrous thoughts and purposes of God. Baptism by water introduces us into a new position *on earth*, but the baptism of the Holy Ghost introduces the believer to a circle of things connected with *heaven*, and gives him capacity to enter into heavenly things.

The Spirit carries our affections into the region of eternal life. He is "a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John iv. 14); He brings us into the circle of "heavenly things," and is the present power by which we can appropriate and enjoy our privileges.

But if this be so, it is of immense importance that our hearts should be

UNDER THE SWAY OF THE SPIRIT,

and we are sure to be tested as to this. CHRIST is everything to hearts that are under the sway of the Spirit, and a lovely picture of this is presented to our view in the chapter before us. "Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto Him, Rabbi (which is to say, being interpreted, Master), where dwellest Thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day: for it was about the tenth hour." John's involuntary exclamation arrested the hearts of his two disciples, and brought them under the divine attraction of a new Object. "They followed Jesus." He had become their absorbing Object, and His company their supreme desire. A third was soon added to their number, and the three together present a beautiful pattern of the Christian company, John (for I do not doubt he was one of the three, though unnamed) representing the *affection* of the company, Andrew

its *testimony* and *service*, and Peter expressive of the fact that it is *a structure of living stones*—an imperishable edifice, in which divine grace and glory will be displayed for ever. Such is the company which is now being gathered out of the world by the grace of God—a company which finds its Centre and Object in the Son of God. How completely this carries us outside the range of everything that is of man! *Men* have set up great church systems and sectarian parties, but here we see the character of what GOD is doing. All the activity of His grace tends to this result—that there should be a company on earth in the unity of the divine nature, and under the sway of the Holy Ghost, a company here for CHRIST. May the light of God's gracious purpose shine brightly in each of our hearts, and may we be true to the character of the company to which we belong! Thus may we learn, in a deeper and fuller way, our privileges as being of the wondrous company of which Christ speaks as "My Assembly."

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